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A SPOILED PRIEST
& *OTHER STORIES*



" HIS FACE WAS ASHEN, HIS HANDS WERE COLD AND TREMBLING." *Page 14.*

A SPOILED PRIEST & *OTHER STORIES*

BY THE REV.

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AUTHOR OF "THE TRIUMPH OF FAILURE"
"MY NEW CURATE," ETC.

WITH NINE ILLUSTRATIONS

BY M. HEALY

BURNS & OATES, LTD.

28 ORCHARD STREET
LONDON, W.

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE
LONDON, E.C.

1905

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A SPOILED PRIEST*

I

HE kept his school in a large town in the county Waterford. His range of attainments was limited ; but what he knew he knew well, and could impart it to his pupils. He did his duty conscientiously by constant, unremitting care, and he emphasised his teachings by frequent appeals to the ferule.

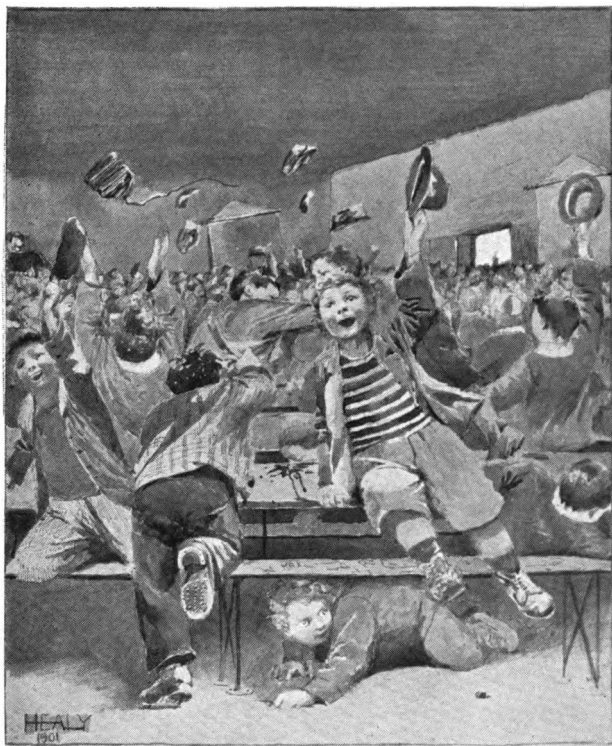
(A) However, on one day in midsummer it would be clearly seen that all hostilities were suspended and a truce proclaimed. This one day in each year was eagerly looked forward to by the boys. The master would come in, dressed in his Sunday suit, with a white rose in his button-hole, and on his lips a smile—a deep,

* This is the term used in some parts of the country to express the failure of a student who has just put his foot within the precincts of the sanctuary, and been rejected. Up to quite a recent period such an ill-fated youth was regarded by the peasantry with a certain amount of scorn, not unmingled with superstition. Happily, larger ideas are being developed even on this subject ; and not many now believe that no good fortune can ever be the lot of him who has made the gravest initial mistake of his life.

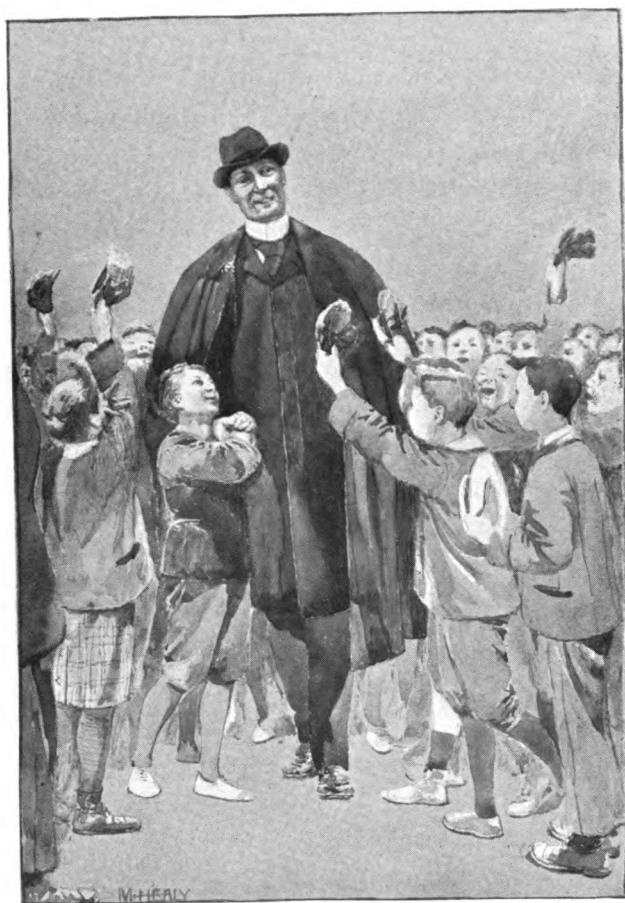
broad, benevolent smile—which, to preserve his dignity, he would vainly try to conceal. No implement of torture was visible on that day; and the lessons were repeated, not with the usual rigid formalism but in a perfunctory manner, *ad tempus terendum*. Twelve o'clock would strike, the master would smite the desk and cry :

“Donovan, take the wheelbarrow and bring down Master Kevin’s portmanteau from the station.”

Then there was anarchy. Forms were upset, desks overturned, caps flung high as the rafters, and a yell, such as might be given by Comanches around the stake, broke from three hundred boys as they rushed pell-mell from the school. The master would make a feeble effort at restoring order, but his pride in his boy, coming home from Maynooth, stifled the habitual tyranny which brooked no disobedience or disorder. In two long lines the boys, under the command of some natural leader, would be drawn up in front of the school. In half-an-hour the wheelbarrow and trunk would be rolled up the gravelled walk; then the expected hero would appear. One tremendous salvo of cheers, and then a glorious holiday !



**"A YELL BROKE FROM THREE HUNDRED BOYS AS THEY
RUSHED PELL-MELL FROM SCHOOL." *To face page 2.***



"ONE TREMENDOUS SALVO OF CHEERS AND THEN A
GLORIOUS HOLIDAY." *To face page 3.*

II

THERE was, however, amongst these young lads, one to whom the home-coming of the Maynooth student was of special interest. He was a fair-haired, delicate boy, with large, wistful blue eyes, that looked at you as if they saw something behind and beyond you. He was a bit of a dreamer, too ; and when the other lads were shouting at play, he went alone to some copse or thicket, and with a book, or more often without one, would sit and think, and look dreamily at floating clouds or running stream, and then, with a sigh, go back to the weary desk again. Now, he had one idol enshrined in the most sacred recesses of his heart, and that was Kevin O'Donnell. It is quite probable his worship commenced when he heard his sisters at home discussing the merits of this young student in that shy, half-affectionate, half-reverential manner in which Irish girls are wont to speak of candidates for the priesthood. And when he heard, around the winter fireside, stories of the intellectual prowess of his hero, in that exaggerated fashion which the imagination of the Irish people so much affects, he worshipped

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in secret this "Star of the South," and made desperate vows on sleepless nights to emulate and imitate him. What, then, was his delight when, on one of these glorious summer holidays, the tall, pale-faced student, "lean" like Dante, "from much thought," came and invited all his friends to the tea and music that were dispensed at the school-house on Sunday evenings ; and when he turned round and, placing his hand on the flaxen curls of the boys, said :

"And this little man must come too ; I insist on it."

Oh ! those glorious summer evenings, when the long yellow streamers of the sun lit up the dingy school-house, and the master, no longer the Rhadamanthus of the ruler and rattan, but the magician and conjurer, drew the sweetest sounds from the old violin, and the girls, in their Sunday dresses, swept round in dizzy circles ; when the tea and lemonade, and such fairy cakes went round ; and the hero, in his long black coat, came over and asked the child how he enjoyed himself, and the boy thought it was heaven, or at least the vestibule and atrium thereof. But even this fairy-land was nothing to the home-coming, when the great tall



**"AND THIS LITTLE MAN MUST
COME TOO." *To face page 4.***



**"HE WRAPPED HIM ROUND WITH THE
FOLDS OF HIS GREAT MAYNOOTH CLOAK."
*To face page 5.***

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student lifted the sleepy boy on his shoulders, and wrapped him round against the night air with the folds of his great Maynooth cloak, that was clasped with brass chains that ran through lions' heads, and took him out under the stars, and the warm summer air played around them ; and in a delicious half-dream they went home, and the child dreamt of fairy princesses and celestial music, and all was incense and adulation before his idol and prodigy. Ah ! the dreams of childhood. What a heaven they would make this world, if only children could speak, and if only their elders would listen !

So two or three years sped by, and then came a rude shock. For one day in the early summer, the day on which the students were expected home, and the boys were on the tiptoe of expectation for their glorious holiday, a quiet, almost inaudible whisper went round that there was something wrong. The master came into school in his ordinary dress ; there was no rose in his button-hole ; he was quiet, painfully, pitifully quiet ; he looked aged, and there were a few wrinkles round his mouth never seen before. A feeling of awe crept over the faces of the boys. They feared to speak. The sight

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of the old man going around listlessly, without a trace of the old fury, touched them deeply. They would have preferred one of his furious explosions of passion. Once in the morning he lifted the rattan to a turbulent young ruffian, but, after swishing it in the air, he let it fall, like one paralysed, to the ground, and then he broke the stick across his knees, and flung the fragments from the window. The boys could have cried for him. He dismissed them at twelve o'clock, and they dispersed without a cheer.

What was it all ? Was Kevin dead ?

By-and-by, in whispers around the hearth, he heard that Kevin was coming home no more. Some one whispered : "He was expelled ;" but this supposition was rejected angrily. "He would never be priested," said another.

"Why ?"

"No one knows. The professors won't tell."

And some said they expected it all along. "These great stars fall sometimes ; he was too proud and stuck-up, he wouldn't spake to the common people—the ould neighbours." But in most hearts there was genuine regret, and the truest sympathy for the poor father and mother,

to whom this calamity meant the deepest disgrace. They would never lift their heads again. Often, for hours together, Kevin's mother would linger around the fireside, receiving such sympathy as only Irish hearts can give. Her moans sank deep into the soul of the listening child.

"Sure I thought that next Sunday I would see my poor boy in vestments at the altar of God, and then I could die happy. Oh, wirra, wirra! O Kevin! Kevin! what did you do? what did you do at all, at all? When he was a little weeshy fellow he used to be playing at saying Mass—'Dominus vobiscum,' and his little sisters used to be serving. Once his father beat him because he thought it wasn't right. And I said: 'Let the boy alone, James; sure you don't know what God has in store for him. Who knows but one day we'll be getting his blessing.' Oh, my God, Thy will be done!"

"How do you know yet?" the friends would say; "perhaps he's only gone to Dublin, and may be home to-morrow."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am, but no. Sure his father read the letter for me. 'Good-bye, father,' it said; 'good-bye, mother; you'll never see me again. But I've done nothing to disgrace ye.

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Would father let me see his face once more ?
I'll be passing by on the mail to-morrow on
my way to America.' "

" And did he go to see him ? "

" Oh no ! he wouldn't. His heart was that
black against his son he swore he should never
see his face again."

" Wisha, then," the women would say, " how
proud he is ! What did the poor boy do ? I
suppose he never made a mistake himself,
indeed ! "

But the young girls kept silent. They had
mutely taken down the idol from their shrine,
or rather drawn the dark veil of pitying forget-
fulness over it. A student refused Orders was
something too terrible. The star had fallen in
the sea.

His little friend, however, was loyal to the
heart's core. He knew that his hero had done
no wrong. He was content to wait and see him
justified. He would have given anything to
have been able to say a parting word. If he
had known Kevin was passing by, shrouded in
shame, he would have made his way to the
station and braved even the hissing engine, that
was always such a terror to him, to touch the

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hand of his friend once more and assure him of his loyalty. He thought with tears in his eyes of the lonely figure crossing the dread Atlantic ; and his nurse was sure he was in for a fit of illness, for the boy moaned in his sleep, and there were tears on his cheeks at midnight.

But from that day his son's name never passed the father's lips. He had uttered in his own mind the cold, iron sentence : " Non ragioniam di lor."

III

THE years sped on relentlessly. Never a word came from the exiled student. In a few months the heart-broken mother died. The great school passed into the hands of monks ; and the master, in his old age, had to open a little school in the suburbs of the town. Families had been broken up and dispersed, and event after event had obliterated every vestige of the little tragedy, even to the names of the chief actors or sufferers. But in the heart of the little boy, Kevin O'Donnell's name was written in letters of fire and gold. His grateful memory held fast its hero. Then he, too, had to go to college—and for the priesthood. On his very entrance into

his Diocesan Seminary he was asked his name and birthplace. When he mentioned the latter, a young Professor exclaimed :

“ Why, Kevin O'Donnell was from there ! ”

The boy nearly choked. A few weeks after, his heart in his mouth, he timidly approached the Professor, and asked :

“ Did you know Kevin O'Donnell ? ”

“ Why, of course,” said the priest ; “ he was a class-fellow of mine.”

“ What was—was—thought of him in Maynooth ? ”

“ Why, that he was the cleverest, ablest, jolliest, dearest fellow that ever lived. You couldn't help loving him. He swept the two soluses in his logic year, led his class up to the second year's divinity, then fell away, but again came to the front easily in his fourth. We used to say that he ‘ thought in Greek.’ ”

“ And why did he leave ? Why wasn't he ordained ? ”

“ Ah ! there's the mystery, and it's a clever man that could answer it. No one knows.”

They became great friends by reason of this common love for the disgraced student, and one evening in the early summer the Professor told

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the boy all he knew. He had an attentive listener. The conversation came around in this way. Something in the air, or the glance of the sun, or some faint perfume of hyacinth or early rose, awoke remembrances in the mind of the boy, and he said, as they sat under some dwarfed elms :

“This reminds me of Kevin and his holidays at home. The same summer evening, the same sunlight—only a little faded to me—the old school-room lighted up by the sunset, the little musical parties, the young ladies in their white dresses, my head swimming round as they danced by in polka and schottische——”

“Ha !” said the Professor. But, recovering himself, he said hastily :

“Well, go on !”

“Oh, nothing more !” said the boy ; “but my homeward rides on Kevin’s shoulders, and the long folds of his cloak wrapped around me, and—and—how I worshipped him !”

There was a pause, the Professor looking very solemn and thoughtful.

“But, father,” said the boy, “you never told me. How did it all happen ?”

“This way,” said the Professor, shaking him-

self from his reverie. "You must know, at least you will know some time, that there is in Maynooth one day—a day of general judgment, a 'Dies iræ, dies illa'—before which the terrors of Jehoshaphat, far away as they are, pale into utter insignificance. It is the day of the 'Order list'—or, in plainer language, it is the dread morning when those who are deemed worthy are called to Orders, and those who are deemed unworthy are rejected. It is a serious ordeal to all. Even the young logician, who is going to be called to tonsure only, looks with fearful uncertainty to his chances. It is always a stinging disgrace to be set aside—or, in college slang, 'to be clipped.' But for the fourth year's divine who is finishing his course, it is the last chance; and woe to him if he fails! He goes out into the world with the brand of shame upon him, and men augur no good of his future. Now, our friend Kevin had been unmercifully 'clipped' up to the last day. Why, we could not ascertain. He was clever; too clever. He had no great faults of character; he was a little careful, perhaps foppish, in his dress; he affected a good deal of culture and politeness; but, so far as we could see, and students are the best judges,

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there was nothing in his conduct or character to unfit him for the sacred office. But we don't know. There are no mistakes made in that matter. Students who are unfit sometimes steal into the sanctuary, but really fit and worthy students are never rejected. There may be mistakes in selection ; there are none in rejection. Well, the fateful morning came. We were all praying for poor Kevin. The most impenetrable silence is kept by the Professors on this matter. Neither by word nor sign could we guess what chances he had ; and this added to our dread interest in him. In fact, nothing else was talked of but Kevin's chances ; and I remember how many and how diverse were the opinions entertained about them. The bell rang, and we all trooped into the Senior Prayer Hall. We faced the altar, three hundred and fifty anxious students, if I except the deacons and subdeacons, who, with their books—that is, their breviaries — under their arms, looked jaunty enough. I was one of them, for I was ordained Deacon the previous year, and I was certain of my call to Priesthood ; but my heart was like lead. Kevin walked in with me.

“ ‘Cheer up, old man,’ I said ; ‘I tell you

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it will be all right. Come, sit near me.' His face was ashen, his hands cold and trembling. He picked up the end of his soutane, and began to open and close the buttons nervously. The superiors—four Deans, the Vice-President, and President—came in and took their places in the gallery behind us, and at the end of the hall. An awful silence filled the place. Then the President began, after a brief formula, to call out rapidly in Latin the names of those who were selected 'ad primam tonsuram.' He passed on to the Porters, the Lectors, the Acolytes, the Exorcists. Then came the higher Orders, and hearts beat anxiously. But this was rapidly over. Then came the solemn words, 'Ad Presbyteratum.' Poor Kevin dropped his soutane, and closed his hands tightly. My name was read out first in alphabetical order. Kevin's name should come in between the names O'Connor and Quinn. The President read rapidly down the list, called :

Gulielmus O'Connor, Dunensis ;
Matthæus Quinn, Midensis ;

and thus sentence was passed.

Kevin was rejected. I heard him start, and draw in his breath rapidly two or three times.

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I was afraid to look at him. The list was closed. The Superiors departed, apparently heedless of the dread desolation they had caused; for nothing is so remarkable in our colleges as the apparent utter indifference of Professors and Superiors to the feelings or interests of the students. I said 'apparent' because, as a matter of fact, the keenest interest is felt in every student from his entrance to his departure. He is not only constantly under surveillance, but he is spoken of, canvassed, his character, talents, habits passed under survey by those grave, solemn men, who preserve, in their intercourse with the students, a sphinx-like silence and indifference, which to many is painful and inexplicable.

"Well, the ordeal was over; and we rose to depart. Then Kevin turned round and looked at me. He smiled in a ghastly way, and said: 'This little tragedy is over.'

"I said nothing. Words would have been mockery under such a stunning blow. Nothing else was talked of in the house for the remaining days. There was infinite sympathy for poor Kevin, and even the superiors dropped the veil of reserve, and spoke kindly to him. It is

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customary to ask some one of the Superiors the cause of rejection. To keep away from them savours of pride. Kevin went to the Vice-President, a kindly old man, and asked why he was deemed unfit for Orders. The old priest placed his hands on Kevin's shoulders and said, through his tears :

“ ‘ Nothing in particular, my dear ; but some general want of the ecclesiastical manner and spirit.’

“ ‘ I haven't been a hypocrite,’ replied Kevin ; ‘ I wore my heart on my sleeve. Perhaps if—’ he said no more.

“ The examinations were over. The day for the distribution of prizes came on. The Bishops assembled in the Prayer Hall. The list of prize-men was called. Kevin was first in Theology, first in Scripture, second in Ecclesiastical History, first in Hebrew. It was a ghastly farce. Kevin, of course, was not there. Later in the day a deputation of the students of the diocese waited on their Bishop. It was a most unusual proceeding. They asked the Bishop to ordain Kevin, in spite of the adverse decision of the College authorities. They met under the President's apartments. The Bishop, grave and dignified,

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listened with sympathy, and when their representations had been made, he said he would consult the President.

“It was a faint gleam of hope. They waited, Kevin in their midst, for three-quarters of an hour, hoping, despairing, anxious. The Bishop came down. With infinite pity he looked at Kevin, and said : ‘I am sorry, Mr. O’Donnell, I can do nothing for you. I cannot contravene the will of the Superiors.’ Then the last hope fled. Next day Kevin was on his way to America. That is all. You’ll understand it better when you go to Maynooth.”

He did go in due time, and he understood the story better. Like a careful dramatist, he went over scene after scene in the College life of Kevin. He found his desk, his cell ; he sought out every tradition in the College concerning him ; and that College, completely sequestered from the outer world as it is, is very rich in traditions, and tenacious of them. He stood in the wide porch under the President’s apartments and pictured the scene of Kevin’s final dismissal from the sacred ministry. And the first time he sat in the Prayer-Hall, at the calling of the Order list, although he himself was concerned,

B

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he forgot everything but the picture of his hero, unnerved, despairing, and saw his ghastly smile, and heard : " This little tragedy is over."

Once or twice he ventured to ask one of the deans whether he had ever heard of Kevin O'Donnell, and what was the secret of his rejection.

" Ah ! yes, he knew him well. Clever, ambitious, rather worldly-minded. Why was he finally thought unfit for Orders ? Well, there were various opinions. But no one knew."

It happened that one of the old men-servants knew Kevin well.

" Mr. O'Donnell, of C—— ? A real gentleman. Wouldn't ask you to clane his boots without giving you half-a-crown. Heard he was a doctor, doing well ; was married, and had a large family."

" You heard a lie," said the student, the strongest expression he had ever used. But the thing rankled in his heart. Was his hero dethroned ? or was the drapery of the veil drawn across the shrine ? No ; but he had seen the feet of clay under the beautiful statue. The Irish instinct cannot understand a married hero—at least in the sense in which this youth worshipped Kevin O'Donnell as a hero.

IV

THE years rolled by. Ah, those years, leaden-footed to the hot wishes of youth, how swiftly, with all their clouds and shadows, and all their misty, nimble radiances, they roll by and break and dissolve into airy nothings against the azure of eternity !

Our little hero-worshipper was a priest, and, after some years, was appointed temporarily to a curacy in his native parish. I am afraid he was sentimental, for he loved every stone and tree and bush in the neighbourhood. He lived in the past. Here was the wall against which he had played ball—the identical smooth stone, which he had to be so careful to pick out ; here was the rough crease, where they had played cricket ; here the little valleys where they had rolled their marbles ; here the tiny trout-stream, where they had fished. How small it seems now ! What a broad, terrible river it was to the child of thirty years ago ! But he loved to linger most of all around the old school-house, to sit amongst the trees again, and to call up all the radiant dreams that float through the “moonlight of memory.” Alas ! all, or nearly

all, the companions of his childhood had fallen or fled. The few that remained he interrogated often about the past. This, too, with them, was fading into a soft dream. Their children were around their knees, and life was terribly real to them.

One night, again in the soft summer, he was suddenly called to the sick-bed of a dying woman. He hastily dressed and went. The doctor was before him, but reverently made way.

"It will be slow, sir," he said, "and I must wait."

The young priest performed his sacred duties to the dying woman, and then, out of sheer sympathy, he remained sitting by the fire, chatting with the husband of the patient.

It appeared that the dispensary doctor was away on another call, and they had taken the liberty to call in this strange doctor, who had been only a few months in the country, and had taken Rock Cottage for a few years. He was a tall, angular man, his face almost concealed under a long, black beard, streaked with white. He was a silent man, it appeared, but very clever.

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The "head doctors" in Cork couldn't hold a candle to him. He would take no money. He was very good to the poor. His name was Dr. Everard.

The young priest had seen him from time to time, but had never spoken to him. Perhaps his curiosity was piqued to know a little more of him; perhaps he liked him for his kindness to the poor. At any rate he would remain and walk home with him. Late in the summer night, or rather, early in the summer dawn, the doctor came out from the sick-room and asked for water to wash his hands. He started at seeing the young priest waiting; and the latter passed in to the sick woman, who, now relieved, looked pleased and thankful. He said a few kind words and came out quickly. The doctor was just swinging on his broad shoulders a heavy military cloak; and the priest, lifting his eyes, saw the same old lions' heads and the brass chain-clasps that he remembered so well in Kevin's cloak so many years ago.

"Our roads lead in the same direction," said the priest. "May I accompany you?"

"Certainly," said the doctor.

It was a lovely summer morning, dawn just

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breaking roseate and clear, preluding a warm day. The birds were up and alert, trying to get out all the day's programme of song and anthem before the dread heat should drive them to shelter and silence. The river rolled sluggishly along, thin and slow and underfed, for the mountains were dry and barren, and the fruitful clouds were afar. No men were stirring. The shops were closely shuttered; but here and there a lamp, left lighted, looked sickly in the clear dawnlight. Their footsteps rang hollow with echoes along the street, and one or two dogs barked in muffled anger as the steps smote on their ears. They had been talking about many things, and the young priest had mentioned casually that this was his native place.

“And there's the very house I was born in.” The doctor stopped, and looked curiously at the shuttered house, as if recalling some memories. But he said nothing.

At last they left the town; and the priest, rambling on about his reminiscences, and the other listening attentively, they came at last opposite the old school-house, and by some spontaneous impulse they rested their arms on a rude gate and gazed towards it. Then the

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young priest broke out into his old rhapsody about the summer twilights, and the violin, and the merry dances of the girls, and all those things round which, commonplace though they may be, memory flings a nimbus of light that spiritualises and beautifies them. And then his own secret hero-worship for the great Kevin, and the ride on his shoulders home from the dance and the supper, and the great cloak that enveloped him—

“Just like yours, with the same brass clasps and chains, that jingled, oh! such music in my memory.”

The doctor listened gravely and attentively. Then he asked :

“And what became of this wonderful Kevin?”

And he was told his history. And how the heart of one faithful friend yearned after him in his shame, and believed in him, and knew, by a secret but infallible instinct, that he was true and good and faithful, although thrust from the Sanctuary in shame.

“We may meet yet,” continued the young priest. “Of course he could not remember me. But it was all sad, pitifully sad; and I am sure

he had grave trials and difficulties to overcome. You know it is in moments of depression, rather than of exultation, that the great temptations come."

"Good night, or rather good morning," said the doctor. "What did you say your hero's name was? Kevin—I think——"

"Yes; Kevin O'Donnell," said the priest.

V

A FEW weeks after the doctor disappeared, and Rock Cottage was closed again. Twelve months later the young priest was dining with his Bishop, and the latter asked him :

"Did you ever hear of a Kevin O'Donnell, from your town?"

"Yes, of course, my Lord. He was a Maynooth student many years ago."

"Well, here is a letter from him, from Florence, demanding his *exeat*, in order that he may be ordained priest."

A rush of tumultuous delight flushed the cheeks of the young priest, but he only said : "I knew 'twould come all right in the end."

He went home. There was a letter on his

A Spoiled Priest 25

desk. Florence was the post-mark. With trembling fingers he read :—

“CERTOSA, FIRENZE,

July 12, 187-.

“FRIEND AND CHILD,—You have saved a soul! And it is the soul of your early friend, Kevin. Embittered and disappointed, I left Ireland many years ago. Not one kindly word nor friendly grasp was with me in my farewell. I came back to Ireland, successful as to worldly affairs, but bitter and angry towards God and man. I had but one faith left—to do good in a world where I had received naught but evil. Your faith in me has revived my faith in God. I see now that we are in His hands. If a little child could retain the memory of small kindnesses for thirty years, can we think that the great All-Father has forgotten? You are puzzled; you do not know me. Well, I am the doctor with the great cloak, who accompanied you from a sick-call some months ago. I did not know you. I had forgotten your name. But while you spoke, and showed me how great was your fidelity and love, my heart thawed out towards God and man. I left

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hurriedly and hastened here. I am, thank God, a professed Carthusian, and the Orders denied me in Maynooth Prayer-Hall thirty years ago I shall receive in a few days.

“Farewell, and thank God for a gentle heart. You never know where its dew may fall, and bring to life the withered grass or the faded flower.—Yours in Christ,

“KEVIN O'DONNELL (late Dr. Everard.)”

A THOROUGH GENTLEMAN

SOME time towards the end of the Parliamentary Session, 188—, I found myself in London, on the way to Switzerland. I was not long in the great Babylon when I knocked up against an old schoolmate, now developed into an august Member of the British Parliament. It was in the evening, the place was the Strand; and I remember well what an impression it made upon me, when, as we strolled up and down the crowded thoroughfare, he pointed out to me group after group of Irish Members moving quietly along in twos and threes, clearly strangers in a strange land. It was a day off (Wednesday, I think), and I expressed my surprise that they should not seize the opportunity to scatter themselves, and enjoy the hospitality of many houses which would be glad to open their doors to them. My friend smiled.

“There is not one house in London to-night,” he said, “that would entertain them; and what

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is more, not one of them would accept such entertainment if proffered. It is war time ; and in war you don't sit down to dinner with your enemies."

It impressed me deeply. My heart went out to these Irish *guerrilleros*, isolated and banned on the London streets.

"That reminds me," said my friend, "you and I are not at war, though we had many a tough battle in days gone by. Come along here ; I know a cosy corner where we can dine."

We left the Strand, and he took me along until we came to a modest, but evidently quite new, little French café off Oxford Street. It was pretty full when we entered. There was but one table vacant, far over in a dim, dusky corner, and we at once made our way towards it.

"We get an excellent dinner here," he said, "and at a singularly moderate price."

He lifted his hand, and the waiter came over.

Just then a tall, straight, gentlemanly figure entered the room, and placing his hat upon a rack, he looked around inquiringly. My friend, the Member, caught his eye, and whispering to me :

"That's P——, one of our men, Member for

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the E—— Division, C—— County,” he whistled, and put up his hand.

The gentleman, without divesting himself of his overcoat, came slowly towards us, and when he had come quite close, my friend discovered his mistake.

“I beg a thousand pardons,” he said. “In the dusk I quite mistook you for a friend and Parliamentary colleague.”

“A most happy mistake,” said the gentleman, removing his gloves. “May I be allowed to take advantage of it? I perceive there is no other table unoccupied.”

It was awkward; but what can an Irishman do but be civil? My friend said we would both be most happy to have his company, and he at once, and in a most peremptory, gentlemanly manner, ordered soup.

He was quite tall, bald on the crown of his head; he wore a short, thick beard, slightly silvered with grey, and he looked excessively delicate. His cheeks were sunken, the cheek-bones quite apparent, and his eyes glowed as the eyes of a consumptive patient enlarge and shine with the progress of the disease. There was a curious blending of hauteur and deference

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in his manner ; and a strange odour exhaled from his clothes, which I could not for a considerable time define.

He took his soup rather too hastily, I thought ; and then he rubbed his bread around and around the plate, and ate it almost ravenously.

“ He has lived abroad,” I thought. “ That is not an English custom.”

When the waiter brought fish, he sent back the tiny morsel, and looking at the carte, he said :

“ I see salmon here. Bring me a large slice of salmon, and sauce—mind, sauce ! ”

Then turning to my friend he said, in an altered tone :

“ So I have the honour of dining with a Member of Parliament ? ”

My friend bowed.

“ I have been in pretty high society,” he said, picking up some crumbs and eating them, “ nay, I have even enjoyed her Majesty’s hospitality ; but I have never aspired to be a Member of the Legislature. It is a great honour, sir, to be allowed to dine with you ; and I perceive, or rather I presume, you are both Irish ? ”

“ Yes, we are Irish,” said my friend laconically.

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"Now," said the stranger, taking up his fork and breaking the salmon cutlet before him, "I do not share the insular and narrow prejudices of my countrymen against the Irish. I have been lately the guest of one of your excellent countrymen. He maintained the national reputation for hospitality. In fact if I could complain of anything, it would be that he was almost too pressing in his attentions. But to resume. I am a travelled man; I have seen all races and peoples and tongues; and I have learned to distinguish—what, do you think? Races? No!—all races are alike. I have learned to distinguish a gentleman from a cad!"

Somehow, we felt flattered; and we launched at once into a most amiable discussion on the peculiarities of nations and races; and there was a singular unanimity in our opinions. We thoroughly agreed that there were gentlemen in every country, even amongst the Turks, and when these were mentioned, the stranger became quite heated.

"The Turks?" he said. "Why, they are the cream of civilisation. Every Turk is a gentleman. They are the only race which, as a

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race—I am not speaking of individuals merely—maintain dignity, reserve, courtesy. A Turk never presumes, is never disturbed, is always calm, serene, dignified. And if you want to see the perfection of family life, get, if you can, at Cairo or Alexandria, an invitation from some Sheik to his house, and there—well,” he continued, “I must not tell. It would be ungentlemanly—a breach of hospitality.”

He ate ravenously, voraciously ; but I set it down to his Oriental experiences. He drank nothing, and refused the bottle of Margaux which my friend pushed towards him.

“He is a Mussulman,” I said to myself. “See, he avoids wine, and he is so enthusiastic.”

In the intervals of the courses, he spoke as rapidly as he had eaten, giving us details of all his travels in Mexico, Guatemala, on the banks of the Ganges, and the Nile. He had marvellous powers of description, and when he talked about the charms of the Desert, the great dark night hanging down with its rich clusters of stars over the Bedouin tents, evening on the Ganges, the sun setting behind the Pyramids, &c., I began to feel that, after all, a man must travel to know. But, then, his pale, emaciated features,

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stooped shoulders, and short cough, told another tale.

"You have gained by your travels," I said, "but you have lost somewhat. Your health appears to have suffered."

"Quite so," he replied. "I *have* suffered."

"I perceive," said my friend, "that you are using iodine." The stranger's fingers were stained a deep, brownish red, and his finger-nails were rough and jagged.

"Sir," said he, "you are a Sherlock Holmes. Every night, for many weeks, I have had to use tincture of iodine for my lungs."

This gave me the clue to the singular odour I had noticed, hanging around his clothes, as he entered.

"And you are using creosote?" I remarked.

"Sir," he said, "you are a brother-detective. Yes, I have been using creosote, or coal-tar in some form."

Just here the waiter came round, switching on the electric lamps. The stranger looked slightly disconcerted, and bending across the table he whispered :

"You are in possession of the table, sir, and have the right to interfere. Would you

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kindly tell this waiter to leave us in the dusk ? My eyes have suffered from the glare of the desert sands, and that abominable light is particularly hurtful."

The request seemed strange, but my friend complied.

"You don't wish for the light, sir?" the waiter said.

"No, we have light enough," said the Member.

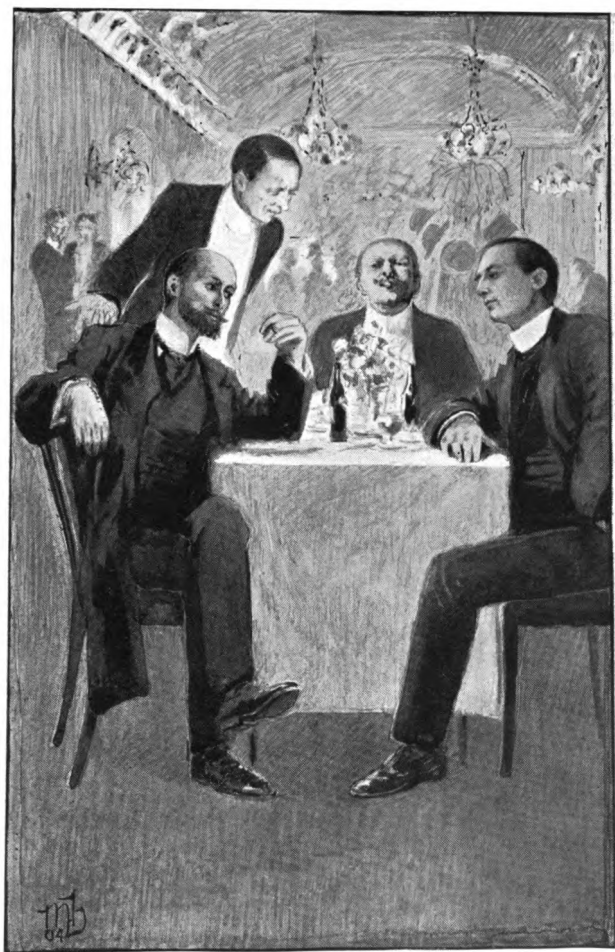
"I beg your par'n, sir," said the waiter, "but this gentleman belongs to your party?"

"Well, ye-es!" said the Member. "We have dined together."

"Oh, all right, sir," said the waiter. "We only wanted to know."

The stranger was not disconcerted in the least. He slewed his chair around, sipped his coffee carefully, lit a proffered cigar, and said:

"Now, there's another instance of the vast gulf that separates Oriental from Occidental civilisation. You noticed that impertinent question? That would be impossible in the East; just as impossible as that a mere servant should be allowed, nay, compelled to wear the garments of civilisation, and these—the full dress of a gentleman. You perceive the incongruity?"



"THIS GENTLEMAN BELONGS TO YOUR PARTY?"
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Now, in the East, a slave—and that *cochon* is but a slave—would have approached with deference, salaaming to the ground, lifted your right foot, and placed it on his head, salaamed again, and then protested that you were a son of the Prophet, that sunshine was your shadow, that your eyes lighted the stars at night, and that he, your most humble and adoring subject, would think himself privileged to die a thousand deaths at your bidding.”

“But that’s all bunkum,” said my friend the Member.

“Bunkum? Yes,” echoed the stranger. “I am not sure,” he continued very slowly, as if he had been deeply pained at the expression, but was too gentlemanly to resent it, “that I would have used the expression. But it *is* expressive; and your remark is quite correct. But is not *bunkum* the oil of life? This old, decrepit, worn-out civilisation would have been shaken to pieces long ago, and after creaking and moaning enough to make angels or lost angels weep, would have collapsed and lain still for ever, were it not for bunkum. What is ‘Your Majesty’? Bunkum. ‘Your Royal Highness’? Bunkum. ‘Your Grace’? Bun-

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kum. 'My Lord' ? Bunkum. When the nurse takes the pink and puling baby, who has wandered hither from eternity, to the admiring father, and calls it 'a cherub,' 'an angel,' it is 'bunkum.' And when the headstone declares that a paragon of all the virtues lies here, it is 'bunkum.' Did it ever occur to you, my dear friend, as you sat on the green benches in the House of Commons, and heard a Cabinet Minister address one of your party, which, as you know, he cordially detests, and would sweep into Gehenna without compunction, as 'my honourable and learned friend,' that this was bunkum ? The only person in your august assembly that is not a lay-figure is the Speaker. No one dare address 'bunkum' to him. He is 'Sir'; no more ; but that is the title of a gentleman."

My friend the Member was calmly chuckling to himself at this delightful attack on Society in general, and the "Mother of Parliaments" in particular.

"Where then comes in the difference between Oriental and Occidental bunkum ?" continued the stranger, between every furious puff of his cigar.

"Mark ! the expression is not mine. I hold

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you responsible for it. Well, the difference is, that the Orientals are consistent ; you are not. The Oriental never forgets himself, never breaks into anger, is never insolent. He does not call you 'Son of the Prophet' to your face, and grimace behind your back. He does not welcome you effusively to his house ; and, when you are leaving, say : 'Praised be Allah, what a riddance !' He may sometimes, under great provocation, cheat you in a bargain, but it is always done in a gentlemanly manner ; and if he does put laudanum in your coffee, at least he calls upon Allah to protect you. But here, whilst you retain all the bunkum—pardon me, the expression is your own—of the East, everything else is vulgar, plebeian, monkeyish ; and it reveals itself in such awful *bêtises* as that wretched creature was just now guilty of. But, here he comes again, the slave of the lamp and the napkin ! ”

The waiter approached, and proffered to my friend the Member, the bill, on a salver. As he did, I saw him give a searching look on the stranger.

The latter threw aside the stump of his cigar, and reaching over, he said eagerly :

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"Is my account here?"

"Yes," said the waiter irreverently; "the entire account is on that bill."

"Then I shall pay for all," said the stranger, fumbling in a side-pocket.

The Member had placed a sovereign on the salver, and beckoned the waiter away.

"I cannot allow this, sir," said the stranger, deeply offended. "It would be most ungentlemanly to permit a perfect stranger to discharge my debts."

"I wouldn't have taken the liberty," said the Member, "but you didn't resent it, when I said we belonged to the same party. Besides, it is a way we Irish have."

"Yes, I perceive," said the gentlemanly stranger, and sank into a brown study.

The receipted bill was brought, the waiter tipped, and we stood up to depart, when, in a pitiful way, the stranger stopped us.

"Gentlemen," he said, "please be seated one moment, if I may detain you."

He had turned away his head, and it sank low on his breast. The café was empty. The waiters had gone into the kitchen, as there was nothing further to be done.

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"Your generosity has overpowered me," he said at length. "I don't know where to begin my confession."

Then, as if he were doing a desperate thing and should do it quickly, he said :

"You have entertained a gentleman, and—a jail-bird. I had just come out of prison, starved, emaciated, dying, and—to die ! For God is my witness, I was about to seek my bed to-night in the Thames. But, as I passed this place, I said, 'I shall dine like a gentleman once more, and then——'"

He paused for a moment, as if trying to remember his feelings.

"You may ask why I was in jail, or a jail-bird, which implies so much more. It were a tedious story ; but I may say at once that I have never been guilty of an ungentlemanly act. I have never done anything beyond what is done every day and night by the *elite* of this city. But you will say I have lied to you, and that is not gentlemanly. No ! I have not lied. I have equivocated. I said I had enjoyed her Majesty's hospitality. So I have. I said that I had been entertained by one of your countrymen, and that he was too pressing in his atten-

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tions. It is true. Rourke, or Crooke, or something else, was my warder. I have said that I used iodine. It is true. But that stain," he pointed to his thumb and fingers, "is not iodine. It is oakum. And the prison-odour that clings around me still is not creosote, as your learned friend conjectured, but the odour of tarred rope. You will object that it was not gentlemanly to come in here and order dinner, knowing that I had not the means of paying for it. Bismillah! Is it not done every day hundreds of times in this city by your greatest swells? No gentleman pays for such trifles as dinner or habiliments. He pays for a box at the opera, or a diamond; but for a dinner? Oh no! Of course I know that if I had not had the good fortune to meet you, I should have been flung out upon the pavement, and copped instantly. But then, why quarrel with good fortune? I never do. If I had been copped I should sleep to-night on a dry board instead of the slime of the river. That would have been one gain. But I would have lost an excellent dinner. Well! there's the equilibrium of things."

He stood up. "I now go to my doom ;

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but with the sublime consciousness that I have dined, as a gentleman, with gentlemen. And now, one favour more. May I take this cigar ? ”

The Member nodded. The gentlemanly stranger lighted the cigar leisurely, and smoked for a second or two.

“The favour is this,” he said. “To perfect the compliment by allowing me to accompany you to the door. I see these wretched slaves have come in again, and are watching us.”

“Come along,” said the Member. At the door, under the pitiless glare of the pale electric light, all was visible. The soiled collar, the blue melton overcoat white at the elbows and seams, the yellow tips of the fingers showing through the shabby and broken gloves, the silk hat brown and broken—all told their tale.

The stranger turned and said : “Gentlemen, I must not intrude on you any longer. I beg once more to thank you. May Allah protect you ! ” Then, lifting his shabby hat, he said to my friend, “*Ave Cæsar Imperator ! moriturus te saluto !*”¹ He strolled leisurely down the

¹ “Hail, Emperor and Cæsar ! I, about to die, salute you !”—the salutation of the gladiators in the arena.

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crowded thoroughfare, and the odour of the cigar filled the air.

I couldn't help laughing. "That was a bad sell," I said.

"Never mind," said the Member, "you have dined with a gentleman."

I did not know how true were his words, until in after years, long after his death, I learned that my friend the Member had that evening parted with his last sovereign to entertain a stranger and a felon.

THE MONKS OF TRABOLGAN

A STORY OF THE FUTURE

I

"BROTHER FELIX," said the old Abbot, stopping and looking out over the silent waters, that were now grey as smouldering ashes, for the sun had gone down with wonderful pomp into the West; "the evening of your profession was just such an evening as this. How many years ago, did you say?"

"Eleven years, Father," said the monk, as if he would shift the conversation.

"Eleven years," repeated the old man slowly. "How swiftly they pass! It seems only yesterday that I held your trembling hands in mine; and I remember how I watched the sun through the chancel window playing in your hair, and I wove mock hexameters out of your name, whilst Brother Alexis was preaching. He was prosy, and rather long-winded, Brother, was he not?"

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"Very," said the young monk, as he remembered the ordeal.

"What were these queer rhymes that ran in my head? You looked so supremely happy, you know, that the caution and foresight of age must needs forecast clouds and darkness. What were they? *Infelix est, cui nomen est nimium felix*. That was bad. Was it not? And: *Felix nuncupatus forsitan foret infelix*. That was worse. How Brother Aurelian would put his fingers in his ears if he heard me!"

They walked along again slowly, the aged monk looking anxious enough under this tone of levity; and the younger looking perplexed and annoyed. At last the silence became unbearable.

"Father," said the young monk, "you wish to say something to me. Say it. You know I have never resented anything your kindly heart has judged right to say to me. But you know, too, I cannot bear suspense or uncertainty. I am too volatile, and unstable. What is it?"

"My son," said the old man, pausing and looking with infinite tenderness at the anxious

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face of his companion, "what shall I call you, Felix or Infelix?"

"*Infelix*, Father," said the monk, without a moment's hesitation.

"Ah, then, I was right. The clouds have come down. And now, my son, let me tell you why. Sit here. Vespers are over. We shall be in time for night prayers."

They sat down on the purple rocks, for the dew had moistened the slender turf on the summit of the cliff. The sea was now dark, and heaving restlessly, though the twilight of a summer evening still lingered. There was a faint odour of heather on the air; for the wild herbs of the meadows and the high levels were faintly contending with the strong, subtle scents of the sea. The waves broke rather strongly at their feet, and splashed loudly against the black boulders, and rolled the pebbles about unceremoniously. One heard only the soft crunching of the sheep in the fields.

A ewe lamb came over and placed her head on the Abbot's lap. He rubbed her forehead gently.

"How shall I begin?" said the old Abbot, folding his hands under his scapular. "Shall I

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say I have a presentiment ? Yes. It is better. I have a presentiment, Brother Felix, that somewhere in the near future our dear home shall be broken up, and we shall be scattered, like the sheep, when the shepherd is stricken."

"God forbid !" cried the monk, starting up in terror ; "that is too terrible."

The Abbot went on, unheeding, in the same calm tones, as if his prophecy affected some strangers, and not themselves.

"The Abbey shall be no more. We shall be scattered. The wolves will come down, *and you shall be the cause !*"

"Me ? Reverend Father. What have I done to deserve such a horrible fate ? Do you not know that my affection for the dear old Abbey is hardly second to my affection for yourself ?"

"Yes, I know it. Nevertheless, such is Fate, Destiny ; or rather, such is the unfolding of Divine designs."

"But this is a serious charge, dear Father," said the young monk anxiously. "There must have been something to excite so terrible a suspicion. I am conscious of having done nothing against the welfare of our home and brethren."

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"No. Our worst and most dangerous acts are those which we least measure. What happened whilst I was away in Rome ? "

"I published that pamphlet," said Brother Felix unhesitatingly, yet as if he understood the grave import of his words.

"I am aware of that," said the Abbot. "It was shown to me at Rome."

"What ? " said the monk in surprise. "Do you mean, Father, that that wretched little rag went to Rome ? "

"Yes, I have brought it back, and with it ? "

The young monk was now pale with excitement.

"Your condemnation ! " said the Abbot slowly.

The monk Felix felt the whole force of the blow. Rome strikes like a Nasmyth hammer, silently, smoothly, but the dread weight of nineteen centuries and of the immensities is behind it.

"There was nothing wrong in the book," he said sullenly, as men say when suddenly accused.

"Nothing wrong in doctrine ? Quite true. Nothing immature and most inopportune ? Alas, there was ! "

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"I wrote in the interests of the Church," said the monk earnestly. "I cannot stand any longer these encroachments on our rights and privileges. We are not Frenchmen to lie down tamely in face of oppression. I am not an opportunist. God forbid. I stand up for what is right and just, and God is with me. The people have adopted every one of my ideas. They have answered nobly to my appeal. Yet——"

"Yet?" said the Abbot.

"If Rome speaks I am silent. I am not going to weigh the feather of my judgment against her vast experience."

"I was asked," said the Abbot slowly, "by a few sarcastic people, not by the Church authorities, who measure their language, whether we had established a new Port Royal——"

"Shame!" said the monk Felix.

"I was asked who was our Mère Angélique?"

"Disgraceful!" said the monk.

"I was asked about our new Lamennais, who would hurl his *brutum fulmen* against the Church of nineteen centuries, and who would die an unrepentant apostate. And I thought of that lonely brother wandering through the château,

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and making the empty chambers echo with that doleful cry, *O mon frère ! mon frère !* And I said to myself, shall it ever be that my little brother, the happy one, whose hands trembled in mine when he spoke his vows, shall have come to this ? ”

“ God forbid ! ” said Brother Felix, weeping bitterly.

“ Let us return,” said the Abbot, after a pause. They walked slowly homewards, as the evening bell tolled out over the sands and the sea.

“ Console yourself, my child,” he said, touched by the brother’s anguish. “ That danger is past. We will call in all the pamphlets that we can reach ; and the stirring of the people will die away after a time. Our danger lies not with mother Rome, who is so patient and forbearing. Our danger lies in another quarter. You know what I mean. It was the gist of your book. Be cautious. Our little hermitage is very dear to us all.”

“ Dearest of all to me,” said the weeping monk. “ Father, bless me, and pray for me.”

“ Say the ‘ Miserere ’ once, after night-prayer. God and His Mother keep thee.”

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There was a great silence in the choir when the monks departed. But it was broken now and again by terrible sobs that burst from the lips of a prostrate figure before the High Altar. The figure was there when the monks came down at midnight for Matins. But no one disturbed it or asked the cause.

II

The scene where we have placed the foregoing incident was the high cliff that slopes up gradually from the sheltered nook, just outside Cork Harbour, where a tiny bay of yellow sand is the only barrier between the sea and the mansion of Trabolgan, transformed at the date of our story into an abbey, occupied by a community of religious students, known far and wide as the White Monks of Trabolgan. The time is the dawn of the twentieth century, or, rather, its morning. In its dawn a wave of religious enthusiasm had swept from end to end of Ireland, just as some grave political changes were revolutionising the social condition of the people.

Whence that wave originated it would be impossible to say, for the Spirit breatheth where

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He wills ; but it was supposed to have reached Ireland from France, where a sudden cataclysm had emancipated the Church from all the terrible restrictions of the Fourth Republic. This had been followed by a great religious revival, which, in turn, took the shape of a reconstruction of the ancient religious houses, and the establishment of some new Orders adapted to the social and political complexities of the age. A sudden ambition seized on the Irish people, who were just tasting the sweetness of political emancipation, to revive the ancient glories of their race ; and to plant on hill and valley modern representations of the ancient convents, whose ruins still testify to their glory. It was thought, too, that above all things the exigencies of the Church demanded the ancient alliance between sanctity and learning ; and whilst the already established Orders devoted themselves to the work of preaching and giving public missions, or the still higher work of the great contemplative Communities, for which Irishmen have always had an affinity, there was a demand for a new Order of monk-students, something on the plan of the French Benedictines ; and their first, and mother-house, was established at Trabolgan.

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This beautiful mansion belonged to an ancient and honourable family — the Roches, whose latest representative was Lord Fermoy. As far back as the time of King Edward II. they were an honourable and leading Catholic family, for we find that in the year 1314 the magnificent monastery of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine (or, as some say, of the Order of St. Victor), at Bridgetown, just at the confluence of the Blackwater and Spenser's Mulla, was founded by Alexander Fitz-Hugh Roche, whose successors also built most of the castles that dominated the Blackwater, and commanded the passes to the Nagle Mountains. In time, however, the family was attainted and outlawed for participation in the Irish rebellion of 1641; and then, forgetting their glorious name, *de Rupe*, *de la Roche*, they sank into the condition of mere Englishry, and went over to the religion of the conquerors. But they remained a chivalrous and liberal family, loved by the people, and tolerant and kindly towards the race that had once looked up to them as their trusted chieftains.

And so, when a home was required for the White Student-Monks, the Lord of Trabolgan at

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the time cheerfully leased the old mansion to them. They had in turn, by the traditional monastic diligence and dexterity, transformed the woods and glens around, and built long rows of stately corridors, and a *bijou* Gothic library, and a little gem of Gothic design—the chapel—where the monks performed the greatest part of their daily work—singing the praises of the Most High. For study and worship were their daily occupations. Study of all things related to human science, disdaining none, but utilising all for the glory of their Maker. Hence there were gathered into this silent hermitage theologians, philosophers, artists, poets, mechanicians; and the world, through its literature, poured into this quiet monastery all its most daring and rebellious, as well as all its most gentle and salutary inspirations; and in the mighty crucible of religious thought and feeling all were worked up into a concrete mass of spiritual idealism, which enhanced the artistic aspirations of the place, and supplied all the necessary enthusiasm, which showed itself in outward expressions, that drew upon the convent and its inmates the reverence or the jealousy of the world outside.

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The monks, many of whom had been educated abroad, were able, by their constant correspondence with the Continental monasteries, to furnish their library with the most rare and costly volumes, many of which were dated from mediæval times. And they were able to purchase from suppressed houses in France and Italy examples of the most perfect workmanship in gold and silver chalices and monstrances, which, however, they engaged to restore should happier days dawn upon their Continental brethren. The monastery, therefore, was quite a repository of treasure-trove, which was jealously guarded by the monks. Few visitors were allowed to cross the sacred threshold of the library and sacristy. Occasionally a missionary priest would go into Retreat at the monastery; the few peasants of the neighbourhood were allowed the privilege of hearing Mass in the chapel; but no one had ever heard the chaunting of the monks in the choir, or seen their deft fingers turning out the splendidly bound books, which were rapidly becoming as famous as Plantins or Elzevirs. The rumbling of the organ was followed by the deeper rumbling of the printing-press; and the strange noise of the machinery

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was the subject of much superstitious conjecture in the peasants' cabins around. Yet, though no one ever was privileged to hear the monks in choir, the fame of their beautiful chaunting had gone far and wide. Many piteous appeals were made to the Abbot by devout, or curious *dilettanti* to allow them, even once, to hear the beautiful and quite novel rendering of the famous Church music. The Abbot smiled and gravely shook his head. He kept for his brethren the double secret that was so often put into an academic form of disputation in the chapter-room,

- (1) Whether the religious life could really subsist in modern environments without the perpetual presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament ?
- (2) Whether, if the Psalter were destroyed, it would be possible to find any suitable form for the expression of sacred worship ?

Then, as may be expected, strange rumours were circulated about the Brotherhood. Their hiddenness and secrecy excited curiosity and envy. The books that were issued from their press became objects of jealous scrutiny. But

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no fault could be found there, unless their enemies desired to anathematise Clement of Alexandria, or Ephrem the Syrian, or St. Hilary, or St. Augustine ; for the Brothers had limited all their labour to reprints of the ancient Fathers. Nothing original was ever allowed to pass the gate until it had been subjected to the most careful scrutiny. Brother Felix had again and again been warned not to attempt to issue a certain pamphlet that had become as dear to him as the apple of his eye. He dared to disobey that order : and hence we left him prostrate in the sanctuary the night of the Abbot's admonition. The Brothers wore a white habit with the usual scapularies and cinctures ; but the capuce, or hood, was lined with blue or red silk, according to the academic degree of the Brother ; for it was an inexorable rule that only graduates in some home or foreign University could be accepted as postulants in the Order.

And thus they passed their quiet, uneventful life, suffused with perfect peace, labouring to reconcile the feeble hypotheses of modern science with the fixed and stable principles of faith. This was their work. Their pleasure was to exult in the very beautiful and charming scenery

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which God had put into this little cameo on the earth's surface, and to rejoice in the glorious melodies that pealed from their noble organ, and which their every effort was to rival and surpass. Ah ! these oak-stalls with their heavy brass hinges, and the lecterns for their breviaries : that floor, parquettèd in oak, and polished into the smoothness of a mirror ; those stained windows, grouped around the great apse window, with its exquisite conception of the great Prophetess of the *Magnificat* ; the shifting colours as the sun threw down its tender mosaics of purple, and saffron, and amethyst, and beryl, making the floor like that of Heaven in the Apocalypse ; the odours of flowers and incense ; the magnificent symbolism of the Church in her ceremonies ; and the divine and enthralling sweetness that breathed from that noble organ, as its faint, far-away notes deepened into the solemn bourdon, and descending from the clouds to earth raised the souls of the worshippers from earth to Heaven—all this ethereal dream of the noble and perfect and tranquil life—how it all came back to the memories of the monks, when it was all scattered like the rude awakening from a celestial vision to the hard and barren realities

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of life! And then Nature, with all its Irish marvels of cloud and sky and sea! No wonder that many wearied and tired Americans—as they glided past this little nook of Paradise, and saw the shining, level beach, and the noble trees, and sometimes two or three white-robed monks perched like sea-birds on the cliffs, and witnessed the tranquillity that lay like a golden cloud over all—thought that, perhaps, after all, it were better to live under such peaceful conditions than under the hot, burning skies and the feverish, passionate, throbbing excitement in the Golgothas of our modern cities.

And yet the meek Abbot had a presentiment that all this beauty of nature and love would be broken up and scattered, as by a whirlwind; and that a penitent monk, who loved this retreat more passionately than his brethren, and who was for ever deploring his impetuosity and restlessness, would be the innocent and unconscious cause of the dispersal of his Brotherhood.

III

We have said that the peaceful community of Trabolgan was an object of jealousy.

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It was inevitable. Their very exclusiveness made them suspected and disliked. It is quite possible that if they had flung open their gardens and grounds, and made their library and chapel common property, human envy would still rage around what was superhuman. But the very singularity of the monks' position—their treasures, their vast learning, and the air of academic peace and power that reigned over their persons and pursuits—excited a great deal of criticism and a great deal of dislike in petty minds. Strange rumours had gone to Rome and been discredited there; and wise—overwise—people, whose wisdom generally consists in their uncharitable estimates of what is quite beyond their comprehension, began to shrug their shoulders when the White Monks of Trabolgan were mentioned. A vague suspicion of heterodoxy always attaches to learning—there is such a danger for the learned to slip the leash, and go out into wild unknown regions of speculation. But the danger came not from the Church, which looks at everything with slow, calm eyes; nor from the people, whose faith is so unerring; but, as in France, from the professional politicians, the empirics in the science of governing,

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especially from the advanced thinkers to whom progress always spells perfection.

This class, fed on journalism, and magazine literature, knowing the names, but not able to measure the ideas of great thinkers, with scrappy notions of political science, and ragged principles of economical government, have been the bane of the Church in the last few centuries. They sprang from the "Encyclopedia"; they will end—God knows where. Just now, they had a majority in a provisional government, under the beck of the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain; and they were bitten with the idea of Gambetta, that the Church was so powerful it could easily afford to have its claws trimmed and its pinions cut. When it became a little older, and more feeble—well, both should be let grow to their fullest measure. And they fixed their covetous eyes on the little treasure-house of Trabolgan. What a shame to have a few monks left in sole enjoyment of their Raffaelles and Murillos, whilst this metropolitan museum was as bare as the cloisters of a Cistercian monastery! And would not those noble volumes suit the empty racks and shelves of our great University Library, rather than the tiny book-

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shelves of an insignificant convent ! And that organ ! What glorious popular concerts might be given on Sunday afternoons to a people that were music-mad ! It was specious, but dangerous. The angry growl of a people, always jealous of Church privileges, warned off the hungry jackals. But the Imperial Parliament ! Yes, a hostile Government might fairly slip in, where a popular Parliament dare not.

Oh, for a pretext ! It came. Brother Felix gave it.

IV

He was a specialist, as were all his Brethren ; and his specialty was engineering. He was a calculating machine. He had a passion for figures. Height, breadth, depth, should be no mystery to him. The magician of the last century had left a wonderful legacy to the world. But a legacy to be lent out at vast usurious interest for the benefit of humanity. Brother Felix borrowed, invested, speculated, developed ; and all the deep seas gave up their mysteries to him.

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Many a night, like so many an Irish dreamer, did he lie awake, thinking of vast imaginary triumphs for the motherland. For Ireland, to the rest of the world, withered and unbeautiful, is to the young Irishman the peerless and rose-crowned queen of chivalry, for whom great deeds of daring might be done, and death itself be met and endured bravely. How often to these dreamers has the grip of the stronger country been loosed, as Perseus delivered Andromeda from the sea-monster? How often have British armies been decoyed into ambush and destroyed, reliefs thrown into beleaguered towns, fortresses destroyed, battleships blown up; and then the smile and the glove from my lady's hand! *Ay de mi!*

Well, Brother Felix was not beyond such dreamings. He had often calculated how easy it would be to pilot a hostile vessel under the teeth of Camden and Carlisle Forts, anchor her in the great inner harbour, land her marines, and take by one tremendous *coup* these impregnable fortresses, that like the Calpe and Abyla of the ancients guarded this retreat to the Atlantic. He had made all his calculations. It was as easy as hoisting a sail, or steering a

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pleasure-boat. For Brother Felix was a child of the sea. He had been baptized in its brine, had breathed its salt vapours from infancy, knew every wrinkle and change of colour on its mobile face, loved it with that intense passion which only the mystery of the great miracle of God can arouse. One of his few pleasures was to go out alone, and trust himself into the arms of his great mother. Often in the evening, when the monks had recreation from labour, he pulled out miles to sea—then shipped his oars, drew his capuce over his head, and let the little shell of a boat drift, while he gave himself up to meditation. Sometimes he remained out late, and only came home for the midnight orisons; but the Rules allowed such elasticity, and the Abbot knew the Brethren well.

The year had narrowed to October, and the Channel and Mediterranean fleets were mobilising on the Irish coasts. There had been a good deal of public interest in the naval manœuvres, and daily reports of vast engagements were telegraphed to the London Press. Queenstown was a closed harbour. No ship was to take refuge there, however closely pressed. The three forts that guard the harbour were sup-

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posed to be fully manned, and to have their guns trailed on any daring vessel that should come within three miles of the harbour's mouth.

One dark, gloomy evening in this month, Brother Felix was out at sea. He had drifted to the east in a strong current ; and a great darkness had come swiftly down portending a night-storm. Already half a gale was blowing ; and for the first time he was anxious. Then the darkness deepened, and he felt almost despairful when a great object loomed suddenly up from the eastward, and he was challenged : " Boat ahoy ! " There was light enough to see that it was a powerful war-vessel ; and that she had not the buff chimneys nor the black and yellow hulls of the British men-of-war. That meant nothing, however, for it was quite a usual thing to disguise the colours of the ships during the manœuvres. Brother Felix fell rapidly under her stern ; and before he had time to remonstrate, he and his boat were lifted lightly on board the man-of-war. Great was the laughter on board when they found they had picked up not a pilot but a monk. They were going to drop him quietly again into the

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deep, when the captain interfered, and took the monk into his cabin.

A number of officers were seated around a central table, which was covered with maps, diagrams, &c., and one of the number pointed with a pair of compasses to some spot on a map, about which there was evidently some discussion. The officers rose when the strange apparition of a white-robed monk appeared at the door of the cabin. The captain said, "Pray, gentlemen, be seated," and courteously placed a chair for the monk.

"I know a great many of your brethren at Einsiedeln," he said suavely. "I have often gone up there from Lucerne. What clever, genial, hospitable fellows they are ! "

The bewildered monk could only stare at the singular scene, though he took in at a glance that he was on board a German warship. The captain spoke English perfectly.

"Now," the latter said, as he pointed to a particular spot on the map, "that is your convent ! "

The monk leaned over and saw Trabolgan clearly indicated.

"And these are the terrible forts," said the

E

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captain. "What clever fellows you are to build your nest under such an impregnable fortress."

He laughed as he spoke. Brother Felix thought he saw some dawning meaning in his words.

"Come, brother," said the captain, filling out a glass of Niersteiner, "drink to the glorious Rhine, and the Fatherland."

Brother Felix raised his glass to the toast.

"You poor monks," continued the captain, "live in such seclusion that you know nothing beyond your books and your prayers. Now, if we had not picked you up you might have drifted to America or eternity."

"Hardly so," said Brother Felix, whom the wine had warmed into emotional heat, "there is not an inch of the harbour I don't know."

"Ha! indeed," said the captain. "Try him, Lieutenant Scholz."

And then and there the poor monk was put to a stern examination; but his pride nerved him to the task, and he fairly astonished his hearers by his minute acquaintance with every sounding and sand-bank, every shoal and rock in and around the harbour. But if he surprised them by the minuteness and accuracy of his

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information, he was in turn surprised by the intimate knowledge they had of the features and geographical minutiae of the bay and coast.

“And now,” said the captain, when the wine and the interchange of ideas had warmed them into goodfellowship, “we are entering that harbour to-night—just as an experiment. But there is a dangerous bank, like the back of a mighty whale, here right in the centre of the channel. What may be the distance from either shore ? ”

Brother Felix told him to the foot.

“Very good. I see you are a seaman. Now, look here, will you take the helm, and pilot us in ? ”

It was such a tremendous responsibility that Brother Felix recoiled. Yet, it was the very opportunity he had dreamed of for so many years. Yes. Here was a man-of-war, fully equipped ; here was a crew of nine hundred men ; there were the harbour lights. His spirits rose. His heart beat violently. All his vanity and pride summoned him to do a great deed of seamanship. Yet, he knew the risks well—the danger of wrecking that noble ship with its thousand lives, the tempest that had now arisen from a half-gale almost to hurricane, the fierce

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seas that beat resistlessly into the hollow of the harbour's mouth, the chance of running down a tender or an outward-bound—all these flashed across his mind, and he rubbed his eyes dubiously, and wondered was he dreaming in his cell. No ! there were the maps, there the decanters and glasses, there the nameless odours that float around a large warship, there the calm, expectant captain, there the officers, smiling at his bewildered looks. He made up his mind in a moment.

“ Do you enter as friend, or enemy ? ”

“ Friend, of course,” they shouted.

“ You know the harbour is closed ? ”

“ Yes, to the fleets at the manoeuvres. We have just come from them.”

“ One word more. Shall this be a secret ? ”

“ Yes, on our honour, if you like.”

“ Come then,” said the monk, with a beating heart.

But when he came on deck the terror of the thing struck him. They had slowed down the engines as the ship approached the harbour's mouth, and she rolled heavily in the trough of the waves. The night was now inky black, no star or moon, only a white cloud of swishing

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rain, seen when the reflection of the lamps around the binnacle struck it. These, too, were now carefully muffled ; and probably, the first thing that alarmed the would-be pilot was the observation that the vessel carried no lights. He turned to the captain, and pointed to the masthead.

“No, no,” said the captain, rather testily, “this is an experiment.”

They crossed the harbour mouth, ran out to sea ; and just at midnight slowly turned, and moved, silent as death, into the harbour. Brother Felix stood on the bridge. The captain was by his side, and the navigating lieutenant. Far below in the darkness half the crew were mustered. Then the monk’s heart failed him. The lights on Roche’s Point flashed double across the mist of rain, and the monk said :

“I dare not do it.”

“Rather late, now, I should say,” said the captain, with his hand on the knob of the telegraph. “Are we in the gangway yet ? ”

“Yes,” said Brother Felix. He saw the lights of the monastery twinkling behind the light-house. He wished he was in his cell.

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"Now, then," cried the captain, "Master Pilot, how shall we steer?"

"God only knows, for I don't," said the trembling monk. The rain beat furiously on his face and habit. He could see the tiny streams rolling from the oilskins of his companions. Meanwhile, the huge vessel moved silently through the channel. Already, the lights at the point flashed behind them. The two great forts were invisible. The captain turned to the lieutenant.

"Now is the danger. Will they flash the light upon us?"

"Not they. They are all in bed."

Then the moments that appeared hours to the monk passed by. He felt the vessel steered to north-east. Then there was a rattle of chains, and the captain, turning courteously to the monk, said:

"Now, Brother, let us descend, and drink to the Fatherland and our pilot!"

Shame-faced, wet through, benumbed with cold, the monk descended. The officers were still around the cabin table.

"You see, gentlemen," said the captain, "I said it could be done, and it is done. Here's to

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the Fatherland ! Nay, nay, Brother," he said, seeing the abashed and humbled monk, "you meant well, and your information was useful."

Then Brother Felix, to justify himself, told them how he had dreamed in his waking moments of that very adventure ; how he had studied every element of danger in it, and had gone over every incident of that night in imagination.

"It's all so strange," he said, "I'm not sure but that I am dreaming in my cell. But I always thought of the completion of the adventure."

"And that was ?" they asked.

"The landing of five hundred marines here at Whitegate or Corkabeg, for I presume we are in the man-of-war roads, and the massing of these men, within twenty yards of the fortifications."

"You are a dangerous dreamer," said a senior officer. "You hardly know of what you are speaking." He spoke angrily.

The captain looked thoughtful.

"It shall be done, by Heavens," he said, rising.

And still silently they took that monk, and put him ashore ; and they landed, boat by boat,

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five hundred German sailors, fully armed and equipped, and they passed through the sleeping village, and moved up the hill in the teeth of the raging storm, and were marshalled by their officers in one continuous line outside a low ditch within a stone's throw of Camden Fort; and the sentinel who walked up and down on the beaten track above the sea, heard only the howling of the wind, and saw only infinite blackness, and cursed his fate to be drenched with bitter rain, and pierced with cold, when his comrades were in bed. He did not hear the laughter and the muffled "Hochs!" that came from five hundred lips behind him; nor the watchword "Sedan," which was passed from man to man from the captain at one end of the line to his lieutenant at the other.

And there in the small hours of the morning, in darkness and storm, unable to see each other's faces, the captain bade the monk good-night!

"I thank you," he said. "Yours was the inspiration. By Jove, what a mistake you made when you put on the cowl in place of the epaulettes!"

It was a very wet, bedraggled, humiliated,

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anxious poor being that let himself quietly into the monastery that morning. He did not think of Matins as he undressed. He thought rather of the desperate, foolhardy adventure in which he had been engaged—its possible consequences to himself and to his monastery. Then a vain emotion swept his soul, as he remembered what a leading and inspiring part he had taken in that daring enterprise. And then he thought, what if the captain's words were true; and I have made a stupendous mistake? And then came a sinking of the heart as he thought what the morrow would bring. And thus anxious, and full of forebodings, he fell asleep. He had a singular dream.

He dreamt that very early, in the dawn of the October morning, he saw the Abbot entering his cell and, coming over, bend anxiously towards him. Then the same vision went to the door, and saw with a smile the stream of water that had dripped from the wet habit; and the vision felt the habit and saw it was saturated, and came back, and bent over him again.

"Poor little brother," it said, "poor little brother! And how will it all end?"

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Then the vision slipped into the usual mock hexameters, the making of which was the Abbot's weakness.

"*Sortes infelices præbuit domui Felix.*" And the vision vanished.

The monk Felix arose betimes ; and thought of all that had happened ; and concluded that it was all a dream.

'Twas but my white robe glimmering in the dawn,
'Twas but the dawn-wind creeping through my cell.

But the habit was wet and heavy ; and that pool of water beneath it !

It may not have been a dream after all.

And that morning, as soon as he could escape unperceived, he made his way rapidly to the cliff, on which the fort was built. Thence he scanned eagerly the sea in front, the harbour behind. There was no trace of a warship in the roads ; there was not a speck on the face of the broad sea. Not a trace even of the storm, except the few heavy waves that lurched lazily beneath.

"It *was* a dream after all," said Monk Felix. He looked down at his feet. The wet grass was trampled into mire, where the marines had

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marched. He took up a match-box. It bore a German inscription.

"It was *not* a dream after all," said Monk Felix.

V

The months rolled by ; and not a word was heard of this daring adventure. The manœuvres of the Channel and Mediterranean Squadrons had been duly chronicled in the press, had given rise to a feeling of national British pride, had passed from the memories of men. The monastery, with the calm of eternity upon it, lay serene and beautiful in its sheltered nook by the Atlantic. The usual work of praise and prayer went on. The secret of the October night was locked up in two bosoms, and it was safe. But what secret is safe ? Spring had scarcely dawned, when the little cloud, not bigger than a man's hand, appeared. It was only a tiny paragraph in a new paper, called the *London Monitor* ; but it ran thus :—

"A singular secret has leaked out from the pigeon-holes of the Admiralty, where it was well kept. It is to the effect, that during the much-

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vaunted Autumn manœuvres of last year, a foreign warship, after minutely inspecting the evolutions of the squadrons, entered a certain harbour on the southern Irish coast. That harbour was supposed to be closed to all war-vessels ; and its forts, the most powerful in the kingdom, were fully manned for that purpose, and its guns levelled on the harbour's mouth. What adds to the mystery is, that this vessel entered the harbour, with all its perilous possibilities, in the teeth of a terrible hurricane. It would argue splendid, indeed unheard of, seamanship, but that it is currently reported that the helm was held by a hand, that was more accustomed to a Breviary. It is further reported, but this is incredible, that the entire ship's crew, fully armed and equipped, landed and surrounded Fort Camden that same night. There may be something of the imagination in this strange rumour : but the country will demand an investigation in the face of our vaunted naval superiority."

The investigation, indeed, was calmly going on at the time. And by Easter it had progressed so far, that the Abbot had received intimation that a prosecution had been ordered ; but he was given the alternative to close his monastery quietly and depart, leaving behind all the Abbey's treasures, which were confiscated to

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the Crown, and would be devoted to national purposes.

For three months, the Abbot delayed his answer. Meanwhile remonstrances poured in upon the Government from many quarters, where the work of the monks was appreciated. The bishop of the diocese went even to London, and represented that what was only a foolish freak had been magnified into an act of high treason; and that it was unworthy of a great nation to notice it. In vain. Sinister influences were also at work from socialistic sources, and the monastery was doomed.

One of those long sweet, summer evenings when the day lingers, as if loth to depart, and memory and imagination lend a lonely luxury to human thought, after Compline and the "Salve Regina" had been sung by the White Monks of Trabolgan, the Abbot quietly announced that the monastery was to be closed, and the Community dispersed. He added that it would be more than useless to demand the reason. All that human influence could do had been done to ward off the evil. But in vain.

The Monks, though thunderstruck at the news, retired silently to their cells. But next day at

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Chapter, their tongues were loosed. They demanded the reason for this sudden and awful catastrophe. The Abbot was inexorable in refusing. Two or three times, Brother Felix, struck to the heart with anguish and remorse, was on the point of throwing himself on the floor of the sanctuary, and confessing his own guilt. But at some mysterious signal given by the Abbot, he held his peace ; and so, wondering, fretful, anxious, the community passed the remaining days. On one point, their minds were fully made up, the only point on which they disputed the judgment of their gentle Abbot. Not a single article of value should pass into alien hands. Whatever was portable would go with them into exile. Whatever could not be removed should be destroyed.

The exodus of the Monks was secretly fixed for the eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist. On that feast-day the emissaries of the Government were to come and take possession of the monastery and its treasures. Faithfully the monks kept their vow. They cut the oil paintings from their frames, and rolled them in dry canvas ; selected all their valuable books and manuscripts, their chalices and monstrances, and

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had them secretly conveyed on board a large Norwegian wheat-ship that lay in the harbour, and which they chartered for France. Brother Aurelian's heart was broken, as he saw his library shelves denuded, and looked around at the empty walls. He refused to remove a book, he remained with averted face, and tear-filled eyes, leaning against a panel of the door.

But the great trouble came when the Community had to decide whether the great organ was to be left or taken. It seemed such a crime to touch it—such a sacrilege to leave it. These mournful days, Brother Hilarion, the blind organist, could scarcely be torn away from the beloved instrument. He wept with it, cried with it, prayed with it, as his fingers passed listlessly over the ivory keys. At last, it was decided that it should remain. Who knows? God is more powerful than man; and perhaps the day would arrive when the exiles would come back, and the echoes would awake once more to their beautiful chant, and the spirit of the organ would return, and speak at the fretful demand of human fingers!

But everything else should go with the monks, or be destroyed. And so, all that lonely Eve

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of St. John, the monks were busy, carrying down to the white beach the treasures that were to be placed in the ship's boats, and piling, as Savonarola did on the square of Florence, the rejected books, picture-frames, &c., which could not be taken. These were to be consumed by fire at the moment of the monks' embarkation. It was quite understood that one of the monks was to remain behind, to meet the Government officials, and to stay in some dim hope that the Community would return in happier days to resume possession of their beloved home.

At last, all preparations had been made, and with the utmost secrecy. A large pile was built on the sands. The vessel was to weigh anchor at sunset, and the monks were to meet it far outside the harbour's mouth, and when night had come down on land and sea. The great bell for Compline tolled mournfully for the last time; and, for the last time, the White Monks of Trabolgan glided into the bare and deserted chapel.

The lamp of the Sanctuary, which had burned, night and day, before the Holy of Holies, was extinguished. The great High Altar of carved oak was amongst the débris to be burned on

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the sands at midnight. So, too, were the carved oak-stalls and lecterns. Nothing remained of all the former splendour and beauty of their chapel but the great organ, and the stained-glass window with its Madonna. The blind monk Hilarion sat at his organ for the last time; his heart was breaking; and he made the keys and stops proclaim it. The beautiful service commenced. There was something like irony in the Abbot's response to the demand for his blessing: "*Noctem quietam, et finem perfectum concedat nobis Dominus omnipotens.*"

But there was a ring of defiance and warning in the voice of the Hebdomadarius, when he sang: "Fratres, sobrii estote, et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus, tanquam leo rugiens circuit quærens quem devoret; cui resistite, fortes in fide."

And let it be said that, if sorrow (such sorrow !) filled the hearts of these holy monks in such a sad hour of farewell, it was mitigated by the reflection that we have no abiding-place in this world; and that our home is wherever God chooses to place us. But, even their great faith was not proof against their agony, when they came to the Salve Regina, and had to bid fare-

F

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well to their beautiful Madonna. Three times the Abbot strove to commence the Antiphon, and three times his voice failed him. At length, by a tremendous effort, he intoned the first word. The monks took it up, and sang bravely to the end. But, at the final words: *O clemens ! O pia ! O dulcis Virgo Maria !* the whole Community broke into a violent paroxysm of sobs and tears, and the final prayer was never said.

Then, after a long interval of poignant, silent sorrow, the Abbot arose, and said :

“ Brethren, our cross, without which there is no crown, has been placed upon our shoulders. To-night, we leave for France. It is a lesson to us never to place our affections again on what is so shifting and uncertain as the circumstances of this life. There is nothing lasting, permanent, unchangeable, but God. I have no hope that we shall return to this, our dear home, sanctified by so many years of blessedness ; sanctified, most of all, to me, by your obedience and unvarying love. I thank God that I go forth not alone, but that you are with me. Yet, in the unknown future, it may be that God shall lead us back again, as He led His chosen people back to the land of Abraham and Isaac,

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and Jacob. We shall leave one representative here. Brother Felix, you shall remain, to set the torch to that funeral pyre on the sands, when we shall have departed. And, now, brethren, say your farewells, for we depart."

The blind monk Hilarion kissed the organ keys, closed down the cover on the manuals, and drew closely the heavy curtains. All the monks kneeled down and kissed the floor of the choir, and, with the Abbot at their head, chaunting aloud, "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*," they moved along the solitary beach to the boats. Brother Felix sat down on the grey rocks, and waited for the end. All his brethren had said, "Good-bye!" The Abbot had kissed him on both cheeks, and whispered: "*Exul infelix felici pusillo, Vale ! !*"

VI

That night the Baal-fires flashed as usual from hill to hill in this land, so ancient, so conservative of traditions. But the greatest beacon that flared to the sky was the one seen from the sea but invisible from the land side, except

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for the thick black cloud that ascended beneath Camden Fort, and carried its odour of burning wood far to sea, and far inward over the harbour.

Just at dawn, at the Feast of St. John the Baptist, a large *posse* of police and military marched into the monastery precincts, and grounded arms before the now deserted home of the monks. Something in the aspect of the place struck the Inspector at once. He turned around, and saw a white-robed monk seated on a rock near the sea. He was looking mournfully on a huge pile of ashes that still smouldered at his feet.

"I beg pardon," said the officer approaching, "but where is the—Superior?"

"There!" said the monk, pointing to a dim plume of smoke that hung on the verge of the horizon.

"And the monks?" said the officer in amazement.

"There!" said the monk without emotion.

Just then a sergeant of police, who had examined the empty and dismantled monastery, came over and whispered to the Inspector.

"I understand," said the latter sternly, "that this house is evacuated, and the chattels re-

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moved. Now these are Crown property—so I am instructed. You will, therefore, make yourself liable for a felony if you have these things abstracted and concealed. I hold an exact inventory, and demand to be informed where they are, and to be shown the place.”

“There!” said the monk, pointing to the white ashes which the dawn-wind was now and then fanning into a blaze.

The monastery remained unoccupied. A feeble attempt was made to convert it into a military college. But the White Monk Felix remained till his death, haunting the dear old place, and living from hand to mouth in the peasants’ cottages, and the houses of the priests. The deep rumbling of the printing-press was heard no more. But the fishermen, who have to go out on the high seas at midnight, declare that lights burn in the monastery in the small hours of the morning; and that the sounds of a mighty organ, and the deep, bass chanting of the monks, are wafted over the breakers from the lonely shore.

RITA, THE STREET-SINGER

I

It was a close, sultry day in the midst of the "leafy month of June." The bright air was throbbing with heat. Not a breath stirred the foliage of the elms and beeches, in whose shadow an occasional twitter told of the hiding-place of some songster, who could not pour out the full tide of his music on the stifling air. It was a day when rest was absolutely necessary. Work was impossible. All ideas of happiness were summed up in a dream of lying swung from the trees in some leafy arbour, or rocked in a boat in the cool waters of some sheltered nook.

A pile of correspondence lay before me—letters that had remained unanswered many a day. I drew my desk to the window, took out pens and ink and paper, and had just dated the first letter, when buzzing, droning on the summer air came a sound that put out of my mind for the moment all thoughts of correspond-

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ence. Back came all my fancies from my friend in Devonshire, and my friend in Dublin, and my friend who was yearning under the tropical skies of India for a word from "dear old Ireland," to every-day life, and this dreary monotone of music that was startling the sleeping moths and butterflies from the grass and flowers in the Park. At last, after many interruptions, it came before my window. I lifted the curtains and looked.

A pair of Italian eyes, black as midnight, and set in an olive face, shone on me, and a set of white teeth gleamed forth a salutation. It was a little Italian girl, who might have been of any age from eight to fourteen. Her black hair was tossed and tangled, and whitened with dust, her shoulders were wrapped in a coloured shawl, her little dress was patched and stained, and her feet—what were they covered with, my little girls? Softest kid and cloth? No! But a huge bundle of rags concealed and disfigured each foot; and my fancy went on and saw that these feet were bruised and swollen and bleeding, as they went up and down, up and down in time with the music, and the smiling face seemed to be unconscious of the hidden

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pain and anguish. Poor child, wearily working on the tread-mill of life! On the hard pavements of mighty cities, along the dreary roads, in the dust of summer, and the slush and mire of winter, aching and tired, and sore and bleeding, these poor feet had carried their burden, and danced each measure in obedience to the strong heart above them. Brave strong heart, that sent its smiles to the little face, whilst wrung with agony—agony from the physical pain, and agony from the fear that the pence may not come, and the little home be fireless, and the friend comfortless and supperless in the evening!

I took the poor child in. A biscuit and a glass of pure milk were very welcome. And then, full of curiosity, I asked her name.

“Rita,” was the smiling answer.

“And where does Rita come from?” I asked.

“Napoli,” she replied.

“And where does Rita now live?” I questioned. She flung out her brown arms signifying the wide, wide world.

“And where are Rita’s parents?” She shook herself mournfully.

“And has Rita no living friends?”



"AND WHERE DOES RITA COME FROM?" *To face page 88.*

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Back went the head in a little impatient toss, and she flung out the first finger of her right hand, and an expression of pain chased away the smile from her face. I asked no further. She bowed, flashed out again her sunny smile, and my summer vision vanished.

I went back to my letters, wrote them, sealed them, and then sat down to think. I could not put out of my mind this poor child. I had heard strange stories of Italian girls kidnapped from their homes, and dragged about the cities of Europe by evil men, who sent them out on this miserable quest day by day, and taught them to deceive the kind-hearted by fictitious tales of starving fathers, or brothers lying in sickness, and then beat the poor children if their begging was unsuccessful, or drank their little earnings. Was Rita one of these exiles? Perhaps lying on the wharves of this great seaport was some idle, thriftless vagabond, who had obtained power over that child, and was using her innocence and childishness to maintain himself in a life of indolence and sin. Perhaps away in glorious sunny Naples some poor mother was frantically praying the Madonna to restore her child, and some sturdy young lazzarone

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was bewailing the absence of his playmate. But, after all, the laws are very stringent against such ill-doing, and if there were such a criminal here, he could not well escape detection. What, then, is Rita's history ?

We shall see.

II

A few nights after this event I had closed up my books and papers, and was about to retire, when a sharp, clear, continued knock was thundered at the door.

"A sick call," said the servant.

I made inquiries of the messenger, and was told that a poor old woman, whom I had been attending for some time, was lying on the point of death in a house on the outskirts of the town. I hurriedly made my preparations, and stepped from the dark hall into the moonlight. It was a beautiful night ; all things were silent and still ; and a splendour as of noon lit up the sleeping landscape. There was a faint tinge of purple in the sky, which the departing sun had left, but the full round moon flooded all

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things with her pale light, as if determined to assert her right to the empire of the night. Across the dark blue waters of the bay there was a track of silvery light, tossed and broken by the fretting of the waves. There lay the huge guardship, with its lines of white and black, and its frowning guns distinctly visible. Far out were the foreign vessels; and close by the quays the tugboats that had parted and tossed the water all day, were held tight and fast by their hawsers. One solitary boat full of belated foreigners was making its way across the bay to its vessel, and the sound of its oars as they dipped and flashed in the moonlight alone broke the stillness of the night.

I came to the house marked out, compared the number on the door with the number in my notebook, and finding the door open ascended the creaking staircase. I stepped lightly, fearing to arouse the occupants who might be asleep. On the second landing, hearing the sound of voices, I paused. A broken exclamation, followed by a moan, then a rapid flood of words, spoken in a foreign tongue, and ever so earnest and soothing, was all I heard. I couldn't help lingering. I heard the attendant rise and pass

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to a chair or table and come back. Then to some question briefly put came the affirmative "Si! si!" of the Italians. Then softly and quietly I heard a lullaby song, accompanied by some sweet notes from some musical instrument. Here it was, as I afterwards found, a prayer to the Madonna, the great Mother of the Italian race :—

O Vergine bella
Del ciel regina
A cui s' inchina
La terra, ed il mar.
O tu sei stella
Del mare sì bella,
Che guida al porto
Col tuo splendor.

I hurried upstairs to the attics, found my poor patient bad indeed. I consoled her as best I could for her last journey. Then I inquired of the attendants who were the occupants of the front room on the second floor.

"Well, then, your Reverence," said Mary Allen, "we know little about them, but a few days ago they came down the street arm-in-arm like, the little one leading her sister, who was ill and fainting, and they sat down on the door-step, and the neighbours came around them, and seeing them so poor and destitute

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like, we asked them in, and they are since in that room, which was empty since the Widow Halligan left it. There's a little bed there and a chair, or rather," said my poor faithful Irish-woman, "we made a little bed on the floor for the sick girl, and we threw a few gowns and things over her, and there she lies patient and quiet except during the night, when 'twould break your heart to hear her cough."

"And no one visits them?" I asked.

"No, then, your Reverence. Of course, we go down and give them a cup of tea occasionally, and we sit with the sick girl during the day and settle her pillow and ease her head, and sometimes Mrs. Hallissey round the corner there comes and brings her a lemon or an orange, and she likes it."

"And are they Catholics?" I asked.

"Well, then, your Reverence, we can't say for certain, for not a word can we understand from them; but we think they are, for yesterday one of the girls here who is very fond of the poor creature, took down to her a picture of Knock Chapel, and it would do your heart good to see how the poor creature's eyes opened and began to shine. And then we went a bit

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farther, and gave her our beads that we got blessed at the last Mission, thank God, and she kissed the Cross like any Christian ; and there she lies the whole day long, her big eyes fixed on that picture, and the beads rolling through her fingers and the lips going. The girls say she's a real saint ; but the little one, your Reverence, she's the queerest creature you ever saw. Before we're up in the morning, out she goes with that banjo or thing she has, and up and down, up and down through the streets she sings and dances and plays, and every one is kind to her and pities her, and then she comes home fagged and tired, and she takes her little supper, and then we all go away, for she stops alone with her sister, singing and whispering through the night. We look in occasionally, and there she is, cuddled up like a ball at the foot of the bed ; but she never sleeps, for if you open the door ever so little you see her little black eyes watching you. But there's one curious thing about her that we can't make out, for Mary, looking in the other night sudden like, saw lying on the chair a bundle of clothes or rags, and they were so dirty, begging your Reverence's pardon, you'd

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think they were after washing the floor, and," said my friend, dropping her voice to a whisper, "there were spots of blood all over them. Mary came away frightened."

Here, then, was my little Rita, clearly. Now, what was to be done ?

"I suppose," said I, "it would be rather late to see them ?"

"Well, then, your Reverence," said Mary, "it's all the same to them, night and day. She never sleeps during the night."

Coming down to the second floor, we gently tapped, and in answer to a faint invitation, walked in. The room surely was bare enough. Nothing but the chair, and lying on the little straw that made the bed was the invalid of whom I had heard. Rita started up and recognised me in the moonlight, and in a few words told her sister who I was. The sick girl turned round slowly and fixed her large eyes on me, but spoke not a word. Her cheeks were sunken and their native olive was tinged with a faint blush that told too clearly of the deadly work of consumption. She breathed heavily and with difficulty, the light covering heaving with every painful respiration. Large beads of per-

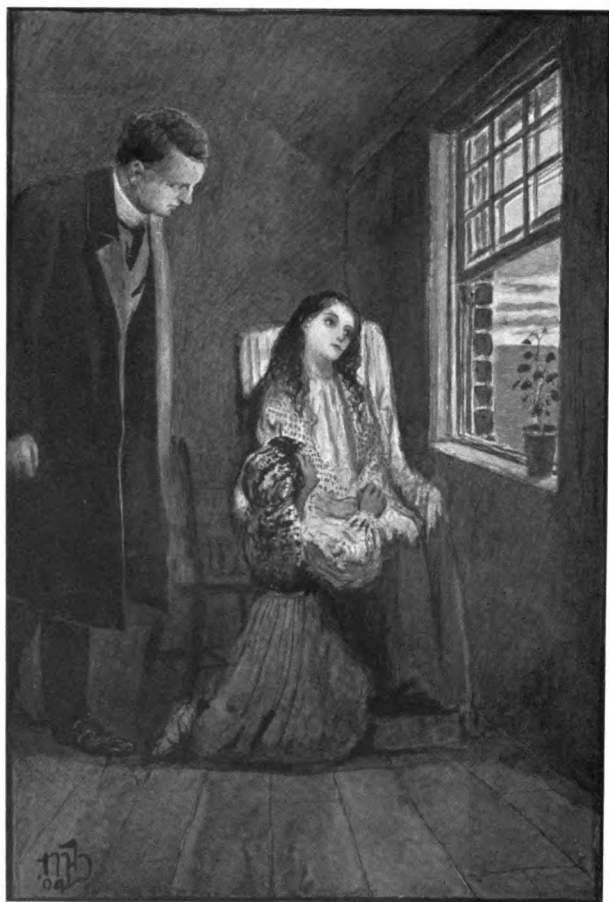
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spiration stood out on her forehead, which Mrs. Allen, kneeling down gently, wiped away with many a sigh of sympathy and many a word of comfort in her own native Irish.

"Sure, here's the priest now, alannah, and 'tis sorry I am we didn't send for him before, and he'll pray for you, and make you better, please God."

And then I took her place, bent over the poor sick girl, and spoke to her of the great Father we all have in Heaven, and the Friend and Master who is nearer to us and dearer to us than all beside, and the fond Mother who opens wide her arms to receive us and gather us in safety under her protection. She stretched forth her hand, moist and damp with the sweat of death, silently pressed mine, and I left her there in the shadow of the night, alone with God.

The following Sunday, just as midday Benediction was over, and I was passing through the Convent gates, I saw Rita waiting under the shadow of a tree. She was closely wrapped from head to foot, and looked more than usually pale. She silently lifted her hand, beckoned, and I followed. Her sister's last moment was



" SHE SAT BY THE WINDOW, LOOKING EARNESTLY ACROSS THE
TRACK OF LIGHT THE SUN WAS MAKING ON THE WATERS.
To face page 97.

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at hand. She sat on a chair by the window, looking long and earnestly across the track of light that the sun was making on the waters. Her brow was cold and damp, her eyes widely opened, her breathing scarcely perceptible. I spoke to her. She did not answer. Fearing she was dead, her sister lifted her and drew her back gently. Still she made no sign. Her eyes were fixed with terrible intensity on something that we could not see. Suddenly she trembled, clasped her hands together tightly, and cried, "O God, Thou art terribly just, but be merciful. Pray, Rita, pray. Look at father's vessel tossing in the storm. She cannot live. There is father himself toiling and straining at the helm. O God! what will they do? And there, close by father, is Maddalena, her eyes wild, her hair wet. Hist! they are rounding the point, coming for us, Rita. Ah! I knew they'd repent. But see, O my God, they have struck! Listen to the horrid grinding of the keel. Save them, O Mother of God, save them from the angry waters." Then came a long pause, and then, gently swooning away, she exclaimed, "O God, Thou art terribly just."

I looked at Rita. Her sister's words had

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excited her very much. She, too, looked earnestly athwart the waters, where not a ripple broke the blue surface. But in a moment her sister had recovered, and now her vision was changed. Peace and grace were beaming from her face as she looked with the calm contemplation of a saint at some new picture which her dying fancy painted. "Do you remember, Rita," she said, holding her sister's hand firmly in her own—"do you remember the wonderful eyes of Madonna that looked at us so sadly and gently? I see them now. Do you remember how we used to come in the cool evenings to pray? and you said our Lady some day would come down and give us her Bambino to kiss. She is coming, Rita, to me; look, dear. Yes, Mother, I am ready."

She stretched forth her hands and leaned forward. We waited a few moments, and then I drew Rita gently away, whilst the Madonna and her Child were carrying the soul of her sister to Heaven.

The following Tuesday a simple funeral procession passed through the streets to the new cemetery. We buried the poor young stranger in a quiet spot, where the summer sun would

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shine warmly and the winter winds would not blow too fiercely, and we placed over her grave a plain wooden cross with the simple inscription :

HERE REPOSETH
AGNESE MONDELLA,
BORN AT NAPLES, SEPTEMBER, 1862.
DIED AT REINEVILLE, JUNE 24TH, 1880.

May she rest in peace !

So the poor stranger was buried. With great difficulty we tore away Rita from the grave. She submitted at last, and went home gently with her newly found friends. But next morning when I inquired for her, she was gone. She must have left before daylight, and not a word or token did she speak or give.

III

Now, the world, after all, is very small. It looks very large, and full of people ; but somehow, we are for ever meeting persons whom we thought separated from us for ever. Five long years had gone by, bringing many changes with them. The grass over Agnese's grave was very long ; the cross was green with mould ;

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the letters were beginning to fade; and it is no harm to say that probably she was well-nigh forgotten.

It was winter time, and I was obliged to run up to the capital on business. A long, cold, weary drive in the express train, and I found myself at my hotel, with every prospect of being comfortable for the evening. I had scarcely sat down to dinner, however, when the clanging of bells, the tramping of many feet, and a singular silence in the street, told me that something unusual was going on. Very soon it became evident. The Theatre Royal was on fire. And already experienced persons were declaring that nothing could save it. I passed into the street, and went along with the stream of people towards the burning building. Suddenly a hand was laid on my shoulder, and, looking up, I saw an old schoolfellow, named Edward Ashe, who was now a resident pupil in one of the city hospitals. We had hardly exchanged greetings, and asked the usual questions, when a fireman, black and heated, came up, and touched his helmet—

“Yer wanted, sir, immediately, at the hospital.”

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My young friend hastened away with a promise that he would call in at the hotel after his work had been attended to. I passed on to the fire, looked on curiously like the rest of the crowd, and returned at ten o'clock to see my friend sitting before the fire, and impatiently expecting my return. He looked very dejected, and after a few moments he exclaimed—

“I've met a curious case at the hospital. One of these actresses, a middle-aged woman, was severely burnt at the theatre, and I was ordered to attend her. She is very bad; I don't think she can recover, and she is delirious. She is raving about Italy, and singing snatches of Italian airs. It is not pitiful, but fearful, to hear her voice ringing clearly through the long wards of the hospital. But I think she has some terrible trouble on her mind. She looks like a person that would have a guilty conscience, and she cries out repeatedly in her agony, ‘Perdono, Agnese! perdono, Rita!’”

“Edward,” I exclaimed, “would you repeat these words?”

He repeated them. They brought a thousand things to my mind. Were they not the names of the poor waifs that had come ashore

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at Reineville five years ago? I made up my mind to see this woman.

"Will you go to the hospital in the morning?" I asked Dr. Ashe.

"Yes, I must be at hospital at ten."

"Call for me and I will accompany you."

He looked surprised, but consented. Next morning I found myself at the door of the hospital. We were ushered into the hall by one of the Sisters, who looked as calm and peaceful as if she was not dealing every day with every description of human misery.

"How is my patient, Sister?" said Edward.

"A great deal quieter," said the Sister; "but you know there is no hope. She has recovered her senses, and is anxious to prepare herself for death."

"Well," said Edward, "I shall see her first, and Father J——, too, is anxious for some reason of his own to say a word to her."

"Of course," said the Sister, and I was ushered into the physicians' room, until my friend returned.

"Now, very gently," said the Infirmarian, as we passed into the accident ward of the hospital. It was hard to believe that this was

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a place of agony and suffering, everything was so cool, and clean, and quiet. There was no noise, no moaning, no cries of suffering. The patients in their tidy beds looked ever so happy. In a moment we were by the bedside of the unhappy actress.

I beckoned the Sister and Dr. Ashe away, and sat down. With all the gentleness in my power I spoke to her, and asked her if she ever knew any children of the names she had spoken in her delirium. She hesitated, moved her lips in prayer, and answered "Yes."

I told her then what I knew of the children. She was very quiet. She listened eagerly to all I had to say, but when I came to the vision that had crossed the dying eyes of the young girl, she looked terrified, and murmured twice, "It was God's judgment ! it was God's anger ! " And when I told her how Agnese had spoken of her father and some friend named Maddalena, she wept silently but freely, and at length said to me, "I am she ; I am Maddalena ! " After a while she said again, "I am now tired, Father ; but I must see you again. Will you come to me when I send, and I will tell you all ? " I promised, and departed.

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That evening a note was put into my hand. "The patient whom you saw this morning is asking for you ; she is very weak ; she won't live through the night." I was again on the streets, making my way through the crowds to the bedside of the poor Italian. I could not help noticing the multitudes that were thronging to a large house I was passing. I stopped, asked a passer-by what was the cause of all this bustling and thronging. He pointed to a flaming placard, which told the world that a young and gifted Italian artist was this evening to appear in the opera of "Maritana." She had been highly praised in London, and Paris, and Vienna, and there was great excitement about her here. I passed along, thinking how closely death and life are placed together. Here were crowds wishing to hear a young singer ; here was I hurrying to the deathbed of another.

The silence of the hospital was deeper than ever when I entered. The lights were out, and the patients asleep. We passed long rows of beds in the darkness. We came at length to one over which a light was burning. A Sister knelt by the side, praying and watching. My poor friend had already been prepared for

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death, and now was calmly awaiting the dread summons.

I sat by the bedside, and without delay she asked me, "Where is Rita?" I said, I did not know. Neither did I, nor had I the slightest suspicion that the famous singer whom the crowds were rushing to hear was the little street girl whom I had spoken to five years before.

"Because," said the dying woman, "I have a feeling that she is near me to-night. I thought you might know. I should like to see her before I die."

The Sister moistened her lips with an orange, and she told me her strange history there in the night, while death hung over her, and Rita was thrilling the vast audience in the neighbouring theatre.

"I was born at Genoa," she said; "at least I think so, for I remember nothing until I was seven years old, and what I remember then was, that I used to carry oranges and figs to the foreign vessels in our harbour, and sleep at night in the porches of churches. I never had any name but Maddalena. I never knew father or mother. When I was twelve,

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I was picked up by some strollers, and joined a tribe of Gipsies. We came to Naples. I left them there, and became a servant in a large English mansion, where I remained nearly five years. Then I became the wife of Mondella. He was a sea-captain, trading along the west coast of Europe in olives, sugar, and wine. Sometimes he would go away on long voyages, sometimes he would return in a few weeks. He was a widower, and had two children, whom you knew, Agnese and Rita. Agnese was tall and delicate, Rita was strong and active. Both were very good. Their mother must have been a saint, because her children were saints. Their father worshipped them. I grew jealous of the love of the father. I grew by degrees to hate those children; they never knew it. Hand in hand they used to go in the soft twilight to the church, and sit for hours before the altar, praying and speaking of the saints and the Madonna. Many a night I crept to their chamber, and heard them pray for father, and pray, too, for me. They both had beautiful voices, Agnese's pure, and clear, and soft; Rita's, deep and rich. The father had also a magnificent voice, and

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the people of the neighbourhood would crowd round our house by night to hear the three beautiful voices blending together. They formed our church choir, and the Padre declared that no one else should sing in the church, so long as Mondella and his children were there. Yet I disliked these children all the more from the love which their father gave them. He had taught them all the beautiful music of our operas, and whenever he returned from a long voyage, the children would go down to the pier to meet him. The moment the vessel came near enough, the deep bass voice of the father would come sounding over the waves, and the children, laughing and flinging their scarves around them, would chant back some piece from a favourite duet, and the singing would go on, the sailors sometimes joining in the chorus, till Mondella put his foot on the pier, and clasped his children in his arms. Oh ! how angry I used to be ! I could sing too, but the children's voices he loved most dearly, and I had to sing to my guitar, for he would not listen to me.

“This state of things could not last. We might have been very happy, had I wished ;

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but the demon of jealousy got hold of me. I struggled, oh! so hard against it, but finally yielded; and then came the question, what should I do, for they and I could not live together. I thought of many evil things, thought of running away and returning to my gipsy life, thought of secretly selling the children to some roving band, who would demand money for their release, thought of more terrible things still, and then came an event which put all previous plans from my mind, for it gave me an opportunity of doing what I desired, but still dreaded. On his return from the last voyage, Mondella invited myself and the girls to accompany him as soon as he got orders to sail again. We accepted the invitation with pleasure; I, because I hoped to rid myself of these tormenting children for ever; and they, poor souls, because the novelty of the voyage was attractive, and the pleasure of seeing foreign shores and all the good things that fancy promised them. We were impatient for the orders which were to send the good ship once more on her mission over the waves. We counted the days; and Agnese and Rita spent many a sleepless night wondering and hoping that

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the morning would bring the long-wished-for papers. At last they came; then there were a few days of busy preparation, and at last the morning came for our departure. All the villagers thronged the pier to say 'Good-bye,' for the girls were the pride of the simple inhabitants. And any one but myself would have loved them as they stood by their father's side on the vessel, Agnese dressed in pure white, and looking in her delicate beauty like a statue of her patron saint; and Rita in blue, bright and vivacious at the prospect of a pleasant time on the blue waters. There also was the Padre, who came down to bless the ship for her long voyage. Well, I remember how he warned us all, and seemed to look into the depths of my heart as he spoke, to bring back to him his two dear children, 'for,' said he, and his voice trembled, 'the old church will be silent till they return. May it be soon, for something whispers me I shall not see them again.'

"Every one seemed sad. They sang with trembling voices in echo to the song of the sailors, as the anchor was heaved, and while the fond farewells came over the waves, I passed

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down into the cabin, and when I next looked abroad over the waters, there was not a speck on the horizon. Then I commenced to work out my deadly sin. Gradually and silently as the ice gathers and hardens on the water, I made the father's heart cold and suspicious of the beings whom he had fondly loved. Don't ask me how I did it. I cannot tell even myself. When an evil thought arises in the mind, it is not difficult to find means to accomplish it. The Evil Spirit is always near at hand, with means adapted to the evil work. And I had no hopes of being so successful in my crime, when the thought first flashed on me. But the days went on, and I dropped the poison stealthily into his heart, and it took effect. Meanwhile, the children had made themselves the idols of the sailors. They sang and played and amused the men in a thousand ways. Rita climbed with them into the rigging, where they had fitted up a look-out specially for her; Agnese stood at the prow, looking out dreamily over the waters, and the sailors believed in her as if she had been deputed to act as guardian Angel to the vessel. They would have gone in that ship to the North Pole, they would

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have navigated her in the stormy Antarctic Seas, so long as that beautiful figure of purity and hope protected them. As for me, I seldom spoke to them, for I feared with a guilty conscience to face them.

“At last my time came. We put into the harbour of Reineville, on the southern coast of Ireland. It was summer, and very warm for a northern latitude. We lay at anchor for many days. The sailors began to complain. Why did we delay? Twice a favourable breeze sprang up, and many a barque sailed out into the open sea, yet we lingered. The sailors grew mutinous. Mondella was gloomy and stern. I had persuaded him at last to second me in my crime—to abandon the children in this harbour. Long and terribly he struggled. The memory of their dead mother, the old love he bore the children, the pleasant welcome in sunny Naples, the innocence and the purity of the children,—all fought against my sinful torturings of the father’s heart; but sin is the conqueror in this sad world, and I, who had abandoned myself to sin, was conqueror here. You ask, how could I do it? How could I abandon these dear children on that shore? Did not

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the pale face of Agnese plead with me, and against me? Did I not know that I was dooming her to certain death? Well, I am only telling my tale. One morning Mondella gave orders to sail. The men obeyed cheerfully. Agnese and Rita were in high spirits at the prospect of returning home speedily. They had gathered together all kinds of strange things at the different ports at which we had touched. Presents for the ragged brown children, for their playmates, and a splendid snuff-box for their Padre. Little did they know that they were leaving all behind. Little did they dream of the awful crime I was meditating against them. At noon, the long-boat was ordered out, and six sailors, Agnese and Rita, Mondella and I, entered her. I was afraid he would relent at the last moment, and was determined that now or never I should succeed. We landed, purchased some provisions, and returned to the pier. The girls had turned towards the town, as if to get a last long look at some familiar object. The boat was ready. I sat at the prow, Mondella at the stern. He said quietly, but sternly, 'Give way.' The sailors did not heed him. 'Give way,' said he, more

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angrily. One of the men, a rough Neapolitan, touched his cap, and respectfully called Mondella's attention to the children on the pier. They had now looked round, and were hastening to the boat. With an oath, which I never heard him use before, Mondella shouted again, 'Give way,' and the men dipped their oars in the water, and we glided away from the shore. The sailors thought their captain only intended to frighten the children. If they had known my dreadful purpose, they certainly would have mutinied. Silently they plied their oars—silent sat Mondella, his face wrapped in his huge sea-cloak.

"We had gone half-way across the bay, when I looked again. Agnese was leaning, a pale, dead figure, against the rough green railings that surround the pier, and Rita was beside her, terror-stricken, but, oh! so faithful and tender, as she clung to her sister and supported her in her arms. We mounted the ladder. Dark angry faces from the boat met dark scowling faces on the deck. The truth soon became known. A few of the rough men shed bitter tears, and many a dinner was untasted that day. But deep, bitter hatred took hold

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of these sailors' hearts when they heard that their sweet children were cast on shore. Now and again during the watches I heard rough voices mutter, 'Demons,' 'murderer,' but the strong voice of Mondella, which they had never disobeyed, kept down sternly the mutinous spirit that was rising. The anchor was heaved, the sails were filled, and in silence and gloom, and the darkness of evening, and with the sense of an awful crime hanging over the devoted vessel, we passed beyond the lighthouse, and steered for the open sea.

"Many a weary day and night we sailed. Not a word of joy, not a song of cheerfulness broke the stillness of the solitary waters. Mondella never spoke, except to give orders; the sailors whispered to one another, but never uttered a word to the captain or to me. You have a legend in your language, called the 'Ancient Mariner,' in which it is told how a sailor shot a beautiful bird, and it was hung around his neck, as the penalty of his crime, and all kinds of evils followed the doomed ship, and his hapless comrades. Something like this was our fate. We had sinned: and sooner or later, our punishment would come upon us.

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It was even nearer than we supposed. We did not return to Naples; we dared not return without the children. We put into Antwerp for a few days; and then determined to coast along by France and Spain, exchange our crew, and at last return home, and say the children had died, and no one could give testimony against us. A few weary months passed by. We had failed to obtain a new crew, and were obliged to keep on the sailors whom we had hitherto employed. And they, for some reason unknown to us, remained with us in spite of their superstitious fears that evil would come upon us and upon them for the crime. Perhaps they hoped that we would return, and take back the children, and that all would be well again. In the beginning of December we found ourselves in the Bristol Channel, and as the weather looked very uncertain, we were bearing up for a port of refuge on the southern English coast. All at once, a hurricane sprang up, and for several hours we drifted before it, at terrific speed, sea after sea sweeping our decks, and with the sails torn into ribbons by the fury of the blast. As you may suppose, we were terribly frightened. The men worked

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with a will, tearing down the shattered sails, and making the vessel tight under the awful pressure of the wind. Still, one could easily see how terrified they were. They felt, and so did I, that the hour of just judgment was coming fast upon the ship.

“The morning broke, the gale had not abated; we took soundings; we were drifting on to a rock-bound coast. A group of sailors was gathered round the wheel. They were gesticulating wildly, and in a moment one came forward, and asked Mondella what was this coast on which they were drifting. He hesitated a moment, then said quietly, ‘The coast of Ireland.’ ‘What part?’ said the sailor. ‘Just outside the harbour of Reineville,’ said Mondella. ‘Exactly what we thought,’ said the man, as he retired and communicated the fatal intelligence to his companions. From that moment the sailors refused to put a hand to the ship. Mondella swore at them, threatened them. They were silent, but determined. ‘We knew it all along,’ they said, ‘we knew it should come; such a terrible crime could not pass unpunished; now the vengeance of God is falling upon us; there is no hope. We cannot

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fight against God.' With my assistance, Mondella threw out signals of distress. They were answered on shore.

"Nearer and nearer we approached. We passed out two anchors, but the chains were snapped in a moment. We could see the white foam, crawling up on the rocks and swirling and curling in tiny whirlpools between the sunken reefs. We could see the white faces of the men on shore, as they prepared to send their rockets flying over our heads. The ship was rolling heavily, flung to this side and to that by the furious waves. The men had clambered into the rigging; Mondella stood at the wheel; I was near him, lashed to the wheel with ropes. At last one terrible wave came upon us. I saw it approaching. I could look through the green, transparent mass of water as it frothed and curled, and bore down on us. Then I shut my eyes. I was drenched from head to heel. I looked round; Mondella was gone from my side. In another moment came a shock as if the ship were parting asunder. I could hear the grating of the keel on the rocks. I could hear the rush of the waters into the cabin. I looked to the rigging. All the men were swept away but two.

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They slowly descended, their faces and hands bleeding, came to the wheel to which I was lashed, cut the ropes, and set me free. I couldn't stir; I was frozen and weak from the beating of the waves. They bore me gently to the side of the vessel. In a moment a rocket was shot from the shore, and its rope made fast to the rigging. I fainted away; and when I recovered consciousness, I saw the faces of men and women bending over me, with looks of compassion and pity. I looked around, and saw the black thatch and the smoked rafters of a fisherman's cabin; I knew I was saved, and thanked God for His mercy.

"Then I said 'Mondella,' and they whispered he was saved too, but that I must not speak again. So I lay quiet, I thought, for many days. And after many days I was able to move about again. The first sight that met my eyes was the wreck of the doomed ship, lifted high upon the beach. The second sight was the graves of our brave sailors, whose superstitious fears were only too well grounded. After a little while, when I had strength to depart, I left the quiet fishing village, and wandered, a lonely woman, through the world. But every-

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where I was haunted by the apparition of these two faces that looked after us, pale and despairing, when we abandoned them. I have not seen Mondella since. He was saved from the wreck, and left for a neighbouring city very soon. All tidings of him, however, have been lost. I think he did not care to meet me again. I had brought terrible troubles upon him. I had made him commit an unpardonable sin. Through me he lost his children and his vessel. I am sure he must have assumed a strange name, and is still living under it, lest I should discover him. But I do not care to do so. Since that terrible day I have earned my own bread. I became a gipsy again, and joined a company of actors. With them I have lived comfortable, but not happy. Nor shall I die happy, until I shall be assured of the forgiveness of Agnese and Rita."

She paused. The Sister wiped the damp dewdrops from her forehead with a sponge. And then I told her what I knew of the children, of Agnese's illness, of Rita's care, of the vision of the shipwreck that came across the eyes of the dying girl, of her forgiveness and her dying words. She was silent, but looked inexpressibly happy.

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I passed from the room, leaving her, as I left Agnese years before, in the darkness, alone with God.

IV

The following day the city was ringing with the praises of the wonderful singer, whose youth and grace and talent had captivated all hearts. The newspapers devoted whole columns to descriptions of her rare powers ; and on reading over one of these articles, which contained a brief history of her life, the truth flashed on me suddenly, that this great wonder was none other than Rita, the little ragged street-singer of a few years ago. A few inquiries confirmed the truth of my surmises, and at last I determined to call to see her, knowing all that I did about Maddalena.

Next day, therefore, I drove to the hotel where she was staying ; and was ushered into a magnificent private drawing-room, where I was left to amuse myself with drawings, photographs, &c. After a little while the door opened, and there entered a lady, so bright, and dressed with such splendour, that I could not recognise her. She

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advanced quietly, and held out her two hands to me, and I knew then that I was speaking to the same Rita, whom I had succoured and assisted only a few years ago. How changed she is ! What wonderful Providence has protected her, and made her so great ? What is her history, since she left us suddenly on the morning that Agnese was buried ? Such were the thoughts that crossed my mind, whilst Rita was summoning up courage to ask me, had I seen her father ? This was the one thought of her life ; this, the great question ; this, the one thing that troubled her amidst all the splendours and excitement of the new life she was leading.

I had nothing to say of her father ; but “ Tell me,” said I, “ your own history first, and then I have something to tell you.”

Without hesitation she commenced :—

“ That morning, after Agnese’s burial, I found myself alone in a strange country, and amongst strange people. The loneliness of *my* life came upon me terribly. I felt as if I too could cheerfully die, and be laid with my beloved sister. I thought what had I done, that God should afflict me ? I thought of the awful crime my father had committed against us, and I asked for the

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hundredth time what had made him change so much towards us. Then I began to think, what should I do? Where should I go? I was in despair. Suddenly I found myself singing that psalm of Complin where the words occur: 'He hath given His angels charge over thee, to guard thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.' You know, we used to sing in our village church at home, and I was specially fond of the evening service; I felt an inspiration that God and our Lady would not abandon me; that I was the child of Providence and the child of the Madonna. I wandered down to the quay, I rested against the railings on which Agnese leaned on that terrible day when we were abandoned. I imagined again that awful scene, and the despair that came upon us; and once more my spirits were sinking when I heard a gruff voice: 'Come along, little one, you can play for us while we row.' A party of rough men and a few women were moving to a boat that was moored under the quay; and without a word, and without any fear, I went with them. They were going to a large Transatlantic steamer that lay outside the

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harbour, and they hoped to be able to sell to the passengers the oranges, apples, &c., with which their boat was stocked. They handed me an orange, seated me in the stern of the boat, and we rowed across the harbour, the oars keeping time with the music that I was playing. Very soon we came under the shadow of the mighty ship. I had never seen anything like it before. My father's ship was large, but this was very much larger. It seemed to me like a mountain on the waters. The crew went on board, but I remained behind and continued playing, hoping to attract the attention of the passengers.

“ Presently a few ladies and gentlemen gathered together, and leant over the bulwarks of the vessel. One lady in particular looked at me, as if her eyes would burn into my soul, and said at last in perfect Italian, ‘This is tiresome, child; can’t you sing?’ Nothing loth, I laid down the accordion, stood up in the stern, and sang with gestures one of those operatic airs which my father had taught us. Before I had done, a crowd had gathered on the side of the vessel, and money was showered into the little boat. But when the crew had returned, and the anchor was swung up, and all prepara-

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tions made for our departure, I was beckoned on board by the lady of whom I had spoken. She inquired who I was, and what was my history, then hastily spoke to the captain, and then informed me that I was not to return, but proceed with her on the voyage. We descended to the ladies' cabin, and my first act was to kneel down, and thank God that I had not lost confidence in Him.

“The lady belonged to a company that were going to America to carry out an engagement there, and she was the leading singer, the *prima donna* of the company. I became her maid. She made me again repeat more fully for her my history. She wept when I told her all that Agnese and I had suffered. In the evening she brought me into the saloon, where I played and sang. Then suddenly she stopped me, and commanded me to tell aloud all that I had told in secret. They must have been very good people, for they pitied me so much, and the lady used to cry and ask me all about Agnese. I had to sing all my songs for them ; and one day a tall, dark gentleman said to me very kindly, ‘Rita, you will be famous yet.’ I did not know what he meant.

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“We came to New York. Every evening I had to dress my mistress’ hair for the opera, and on these occasions I had to sing for her the whole time, and she always kissed me when she stepped into her carriage. During the day, too, a foreign gentleman, a German, used to come to the house, and I was obliged to spend hours with him whilst he taught me. I then discovered that I had a great deal to learn, for I had to commence again in a new way to learn, and many things I thought beautiful I had to abandon altogether. But I soon learned how poor, how weak my singing was. For one evening, just as I had finished my lady’s toilette, I asked her tremblingly would she take me to the opera. She looked surprised, then said, as if speaking to herself, ‘Would it be well for the child?’ and finally consented. I wrapped myself up, entered the carriage with her, and soon found myself in the midst of a crowd of ladies and gentlemen grandly dressed in a large room that opened out upon another, which I found was the stage. I was frightened, but I kept close to my mistress. I heard great noise, as of talking in front; and I think I must have looked dazed, for my mistress beckoned to a

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young friend of hers, who took me gently by the hand and led me into the theatre, where I sat in mute astonishment until the curtain was lifted, and there stood my lady. What shall I say? She sang, and I thought my senses would leave me. I grew white and rigid; and clenched my hands together, and could neither speak nor think while the air was filled with the divine harmony. It was over; the applause had subsided; I saw my mistress bowing and smiling at me, yet there I sat and couldn't stir, until I heard some one say, 'What ails that Italian girl?' Then I rose up, went to meet my mistress, and drove home with her without uttering a word.

"That night, as I attended her, my strange emotion continued. I couldn't speak, but wept silently. At last she bade me sit beside her, took my two hands in her own, and said, 'Rita, my child, you are amazed and astonished by what you have seen and heard. Know, then, that God has given you talents and a gift far greater than I possess. Friends unknown to you are silently watching you, watching your voice growing in strength and sweetness every day. Before many years, and when my voice

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shall be no longer heard, you will be the wonder and pride of our musical world. Far more grateful to me than this thought, however, is the reflection that you are deeply religious, and that you give promise that you will not forget the great God who has watched over you so well, when, hereafter, your ears are filled with the praises of the world.'

"I kissed her hands, and told her how deeply grateful I was to her. The change came on me suddenly. Before I had time to think I was famous. My name was in the mouths of men before I had forgotten my privations and sorrows. My dear benefactress sees me occasionally ; and I tell her every time I see her, as I tell you now, that the more my name is spoken of amongst men, the more fully do I throw myself on the tender mercies of my God. Rita, the street-singer, was far more self-confident, far more independent, than Rita, the great artist."

She was silent a few moments, and I was pondering on the strange story I had heard. Then, drawing a deep sigh, she cried, "I think I should be happy if I could see my dear father again. And I feel that I shall see him—how or where, God only knows."

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"I have not seen your father," said I, "but I have seen another very dear to you ; I mean Maddalena."

I watched her face. She started slightly, but said nothing. Then, without revealing Maddalena's crime, I told her painful history, and when I had ended she rose suddenly, and, in a voice broken with emotion, cried, "Take me to her."

"She may be dead," said I, fearing the terrible shock Rita would receive if she found her step-mother lifeless.

"No matter, take me to her," again she cried ; and I could only comply with her urgent request.

We rolled along in her carriage to the hospital door, once more passed through the ward, when a Sister met us and said, "Not here ; come with me ;" and she led us across the grounds to a lonely house that stood by itself near the walls. She opened the door ; the gloom was made visible by six lights that burned at the foot of a bed on which lay a white-veiled figure. We approached, knelt, and prayed, Rita burying her face in the bedclothes. After a while we rose. The Sister gently lifted a white cloth from the face and revealed the features of Mad-

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dalena. They were all unchanged, except for the scars left by the burns. Long and silently Rita gazed on the face of her who had done her such fearful wrong, then she stooped gently and kissed the face on the brow and lips, and we passed from the house of death into the busy and noisy world. So was Rita united to her stepmother. Was she united with her father? We shall see.

Charity is the queen of virtues : and it is never better seen than in those who have been raised by God's Providence from poverty to affluence, from misery to comfort. Now, Rita made charity the practice of her life. She never undertook any serious engagement without promising at the same time to devote part of her profits to the poor ; and she never left any great city or centre of population without having given a special entertainment for the charitable Institutions that happened to exist there.

V

It was the close of the year 1880. The winter Operatic Season was just closing ; and Rita was

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after adding fresh laurels to those already gained. It was admitted that she was peerless, had no equal on the stage. She had had a specially brilliant season in a great Southern city; and carrying out her great principle, she had arranged for an entertainment to be given in the presence of the inmates of the asylums, orphanages, and refuges of the city. The general public were to be admitted on payment of a large sum, which was to be devoted to the charities above mentioned. The great day came. The vast theatre was filled from floor to ceiling. Not an inch of space was to be had. And when all were seated, silent, with all eyes bent on the drop-scene, it was perhaps as curious a sight as fancy could conceive or pencil depict. The upper tier of boxes was filled with boys from a neighbouring orphanage. They looked healthy, and though a little impatient of the delay, they were, on the whole, very quiet. On the next tier below them were the girls of an industrial school, looking bright and cheerful and happy. Farther down were the inmates of a blind asylum, the boys on the right, the girls on the left. They were a solemn and touching picture. Some had lost the eyes entirely, and there was

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upon their faces that strange, calm, placid look which we always notice on the faces of the blind. Their faces were all turned upwards, though they knew the stage was beneath them. Others, again, had large and brilliant eyes ; but the sight was destroyed, and they looked straight before them into the awful darkness which ever accompanied them. But all were gentle, solemn, beautiful, under their trying misfortune. The next tier, which was the dress-circle, was occupied by the public, journalists, artists, managers, actors. And in the pit, near the orchestra, were a group of aged men, belonging to the institute of charity under the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

The theatre was darkened, and the gas was lighted. There was deep silence, broken only by the hum of the boys. Now, the manager of the theatre proposed that this should be a concert, to be got through hastily and lightly. But Rita rejected this ; and, knowing the passion of children for bright scenery and rich dresses, and music, she insisted that an opera should be put on the stage ; and so well beloved was she, that all her fellow-artists eagerly embraced her wish, and engaged to correspond

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with her, and help her. Now, the simplest, the most touching, and the most popular of operas is "Trovatore," and "Trovatore" was just the one Rita selected.

The tiny tinkle of a bell causes an immediate hush: then slowly the curtain rises, and a scene of brilliancy and splendour flashes on the astonished senses of the children. Their eyes opened wider, their lips parted as they gazed on the strange castles and bridges, and sylvan scenery on the stage. But when the singers came forth, dressed so beautifully, and their voices floated out in the richest melodies on the air, the delight of the children was boundless. Scene after scene came on, and each change brought a new delight. Even the old men in the pit looked up, leaning on their sticks, and the tears rolled down their withered cheeks, as the beautiful harmony stole into their hearts. All except one, and he remained cold and still and silent, except once, when Rita flung forth her glorious voice; then he started, but in a moment subsided again, leaning his head on his hands. He was not old, but his hair was white as snow. His face was a deep olive, and looked almost black in the gaslight, under the

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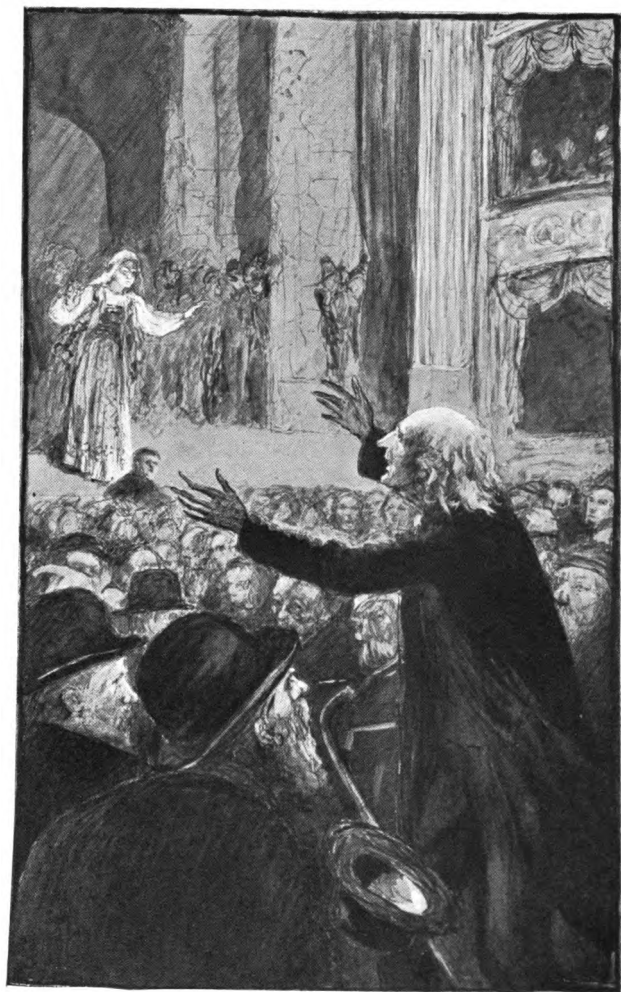
white framing of his hair ; and it was seamed and scarred and wrinkled as if beaten by a thousand storms. He seemed very sad, speaking to no one, nursing his misery in silence. Either some awful calamity had befallen him, or the memory of some great crime haunted him. The scenes changed ; the music went on without interruption. At last they came to that beautiful melody, "Ai nostri monti," or, as it is known in English, "Home to our Mountains." Now, that was Rita's favourite duet, because it was the very one that they used to sing long ago in Naples when father's ship was returning from its long voyages. The father's deep voice would sound over the waters, and it would be immediately caught up and answered by Rita and Agnese on shore. Therefore, whenever Rita sang it, she did so with the memory of these happy days before her, and therefore with a sweetness that was very touching.

To-day some strange, dark melancholy possessed her. The sight of the orphans and the blind deeply affected her ; she felt that she was singing to souls, perhaps more deeply tried than her own. They, too, had homes once ;

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but the father or the mother had died or departed, and left these children, as she was left, alone in the wide, wide world. Once or twice she strove to sing these beautiful lines, but her voice was choked with emotion. At last, by a powerful effort, she controlled herself, and the liquid notes streamed forth, until the air thrilled and palpitated with them.

But before her fellow-artist, who sang with her, could utter a single word, a deep, beautiful voice came up from the pit; and, raising his head, the man with the olive face and the white hair sang forth the rich melody without mistake or interruption. The audience were struck dumb, as Rita's voice and the voice of the old man sounded in singular harmony through the theatre. All listened spellbound. The members of the company who were not engaged on the stage, crept to the side-scenes and peered forth; artists took out their pencils and began to sketch the touching scene, until it closed. There was a pause; Rita stood like a beautiful speechless statue, her eyes wide open, her lips parted, as if a dream of her childhood had come upon her. Then, suddenly rising, the white-haired singer flung out his two



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arms to the stage, and shouted the simple word,
“ Rita ! ”

And Rita, the hope of whose life was accomplished, stepped quickly from the stage, and in a moment was in the arms of her father.

REMANDED ¹

I TELL the tale as 'twas told to me. And it was told by a venerable old man, almost blind, as he stood by the battlements of Mallow Bridge one sunny day, and I looked from his intelligent face into the clear, swift waters, or watched the long plumes from a passing engine fading into the clear sky.

It was not on this bridge it happened, but on this bridge's predecessor—a long wooden structure that was swept away in the great flood of '41, when the big elm was blown down, the sister of that splendid tree that now throws its rugged branches far and wide across the road and seems to be looking for its souls of roots far down beneath the loam of the meadow. It was the time of the yeomen.

¹ This story, founded on fact (the hero-priest is buried in Done-raille), was appropriately printed in Australia at the time of certain sensational accusations publicly brought against a priest by an unhappy woman.

Bitter and black are the memories which that word calls up to the Irish mind. And the yeomen of this particular little town by the Blackwater were a particularly detestable specimen of their class. They hated the people, they hated, above all, the people's priest. It is not kind to recall it in these peaceful days, but history is history. And they had a particular, undiluted, undisguised hatred for one priest, who was correspondingly beloved by the people, and his name was Rev. Thomas Duan. Why he was so detested by the yeomen history does not tell, but they say he had a sharp tongue, a fearless eye, was cool, firm, dauntless, and when he smote he struck straight from the shoulder, and the man that was smitten remembered it. And he flung the shelter of a protection that was Providence in miniature over his shivering flock, and woe to the man that touched with a wet finger the little lambs of his fold! The wolves might come prowling around and show their teeth and snarl, but they feared this strong shepherd with the keen grey eye, and slunk from him with the flame of hate and the might of vengeance in their hearts.

But fate played into their hands. Was it fate or that higher Power that rules our fate? No matter. Suborned and perjured, one lost soul swore informations against him, and eight gentlemen yeomen passed here under the arching elm and across these waters to his home at Sandfield to arrest him. It was cheerful work, yet somehow their hearts misgave them. They had not come into close quarters yet with this giant. They had never yet touched the supernatural. And they knew and believed and felt that a halo of the supernatural floated like a spiritual essence around this frieze-coated priest. Could they break through that, they would arrest him and hang him like a dog. As the savages on Tahiti, the moment they lost faith in the godhood of Captain Cook, fell on him and tore him to pieces, so our brave yeomen, who thought as lightly of a hanging as of a ball or a spin with the hounds, would gladly touch and maul and quarter this rebel, but — here again this supernatural burst upon them.

“We want your master, the priest Duan!”

“The priest has just left and is now crossing yonder bridge.”

And the old housekeeper stretched her skinny hand towards it.

“It’s a lie. We’ve just crossed the bridge, and no one passed us.”

“It’s the truth. I saw the priest turn to the left and pass to the town.”

“The woman speaks the truth,” said Bambridge. “The priest passed us, and ye did not speak.”

“Then you saw him ? ”

“Yes, I saw him ; he passed outside us nearer to the road. I would have spoken to ye, but I thought——”

“You thought——”

“I thought ye were afraid.”

“What ! afraid of a Popish priest ? ”

But their lips were dry and white. They went home.

So did Bambridge, anxious and afraid and puzzled. He would solve that puzzle. He opened a drawer and took out a horse-pistol, such as they swung from saddle bags when on the Croppy track. It threw a bullet twenty yards, and the Croppy pike didn’t reach so far. That explains a good deal of Irish history.

Bambridge rang the bell.

"Call Nan."

A poor, old, shrivelled, wrinkled creature came into the room, looking questioningly, pityingly out of rheumy eyes at her master. He rarely saw his old nurse, but he loved her. Times were changing. He had often been asked to send away that old witch, but he would not.

"Sit down and answer me truly, as you value your life. You see that pistol? I wouldn't harm a hair in your old grey head, Nan," he said, softening, and rubbing down the poor white wisps that lay beneath her cap. "But this is life or death to me." He moistened his dry lips before he spoke.

"What happened when I was born?"

She looked up frightened.

"What happened when I was born?"

She took up her apron and folded it with clammy hands.

"Once more. What happened when I was born?"

"God forgive me," whimpered the old woman, "but I baptized you a Catholic!"

"Did my mother know it?"

"No; I did it in my own room. You were awake and convulsed, and I said I'd save your

soul. I brought you back and your mother kissed you, as if she knew something. Of course the minister christened you after, but I didn't care. He couldn't do you any harm."

The grim man smiled.

"That'll do, Nan," he said.

The next day the Priest strolled over to the nearest Magistrate and asked, Was he required? Yes. He came to be arrested. They wouldn't offer such an indignity to a minister of religion; but, you know, informations have been sworn, and the case must go on. They would take his own recognisances, on a single summons, to appear at Petty Sessions Court on Tuesday. So far all was smooth.

Then human passion blazed up, as the smouldering furnace fires leap into swords of flame at the breath of the south wind. Fear, the servile fear of the poor, whipped Celt, leaped from white ashes into white flame; and the recording angel, if he heeded such things, had a well-filled notebook during these days.

Tuesday came, and a motley procession moved up the hill with the gruesome title of Gallows Hill, on the brow of which the Courthouse stood. They were sad at heart. Their priest, their

hero, was cowed. He had said last Mass on Sunday, and not a word came from lips that were always feathered with the fire of zeal or holy anger. They had crowded up to the altar rails, men and women—and children peeped between their father's legs to see the great gladiator, who was to laugh and discomfit his foes one of these days. Now for an avalanche of thunderous denunciation—a stern, awful defiance of the foe—an appeal to the down-bending heavens to justify him and mark, by some awful vengeance, its condemnation of his and their and God's own enemies! They swung from the iron rails, they panted with excitement—the holy place alone prevented them from uttering their faith and their everlasting trust in his holiness and purity. Oh! but for one word from his lips. No!

“In the law of Moses it is ordered that such a one should be stoned. What, therefore, sayest thou? But Jesus, bending down, wrote with His finger on the earth.”

And then he asked, “What did He write? We shall see.”

The people wondered and were sad. And so, on this fatal morning, they climbed the grue-

some hill with sad hearts and sad forebodings as to what the day would bring.

II

Clayton of Annabella was Chairman of the Court. Two Magistrates sat with him, one on either hand. They looked disquieted, and seemed glad to study the ceiling rather than the sullen faces that gloomed under shaggy eyebrows and unkempt hair. The Chairman was defiant with the defiance of levity. He smiled at the surging mob that poured into the Courthouse and filled every available space, bit his pen, took notes or sketches, looked everywhere, except at one face ; that alone was calm and unmoved in the little drama.

There was some delay and then the Court opened. A few uninteresting cases of drunkenness and petty squabbles were heard. Then the Chairman stooped over his desk and whispered to the Clerk. The latter looked anxiously around, peering into every face. He was disappointed. With a smothered curse, Clayton dropped back into his armchair and whispered

to his brother benchers. There was an awkward pause and something like a titter passed around the Court. These quick-witted people were not long in divining the cause of the embarrassment of the Bench.

After some communing, the case was called —“The King *v.* Thomas Duan.” The indictment was read, the witness called. “Abina Walsh!” rang through the corridors, was taken up at the doors, passed down the street, until its echoes were lost over the demesne wall and the rabbits pricked their ears, rubbed their whiskers and listened. There was no reply. The titter deepened into a broad smile, that spread itself over sallow, grimy faces; and the smile deepened into a laugh, until a roar of merriment rang through the court, and the Magistrates grew red and furious and the Clerk roared “Silence.” One face alone was unmoved. Once more the name was called; the echoes died away, the chuckle of the people was checked.

“The Court stands adjourned.”

“You mean the case is dismissed?”

“Certainly not. The accused is remanded to this day week. There is some foul play here.”

Then the Priest spoke and the people hung on his lips.

"There is foul play," he said, slowly and solemnly, "foul play for which the doers will answer before a higher Tribunal than this. You say I am remanded ? "

"Yes—the case will come up on this day week. We shall again accept your own recognisances to appear before me on that day."

"To appear before *you* ? " echoed the Priest.

"Yes," replied the Chairman. "Here, I'll put you on oath. Come hither ! " He held out a tiny book, corded round.

The Priest approached and solemnly laid his hand upon the book. Their fingers touched.

"I swear——"

"I swear——"

"To deliver myself up to you for trial "

"To deliver myself up to you for trial "

"On next Tuesday——"

"On next Tuesday——"

"March 29——"

"March 29——"

"So help me God ! "

"So help me God ! "

The people poured out of the Courthouse and

K

down the hill, murmuring, laughing, questioning, doubting, fearing, denying.

"Why the divil didn't he cling them to their sates?"

"He's too aisy altogether with them!"

"Wait, an' you'll see. Didn't the ould fellow look black, though? I wonder where is she?"

"The divil flew away with her. Sure he was lonesome without her!"

"May the Lord spare us till next Tuesday, however! Won't there be fun? He's goin' to do somethin'."

"He looks too quiet to be wholesome. I'd give a whole week's wages to see Clayton's black mug again, when he called on Abby. Sweet bad luck to her!"

"They say the whole country will be riz before Tuesday."

"No, no, no! we'd rather lave it to himself. He's enough for them."

But pikeheads were sharpened in many a forge; and down where the willows drew their fingers through the swift waters there was a massing of men and a lifting of hands to heaven.

III

That night a wild beast howled until the early watches around the Priest's house. It was the wail of a hungry wolf; yea, rather, the moan of some beast in pain. At intervals of five or six minutes it beat around the house, coming from the thickets of speckled laurel and going round and round the dwelling, then wailing into silence again.

Once or twice the Priest, as he sat in the wicker chair reading his Breviary, thought he heard the tap of fingers at his window, but he said it was the trailers of the jasmine or clematis that were lifted by the night wind. But when eleven o'clock chimed, he rose and passed into the moonlight and peered around. The glistening laurel leaves looked meekly at the moon, and the lattice work of the nude tree threw its netted pattern on the gravel; but there was no one there. Three times he walked around the house, studying every nook and cranny to find the weird, uncanny voice. Then he paused and listened in the moonlight to the murmur of the river as it fretted over the ford beneath

the bridge. He did not see two gleaming eyes that shone in the thick darkness of a shrubbery close by—eyes that gleamed with despair and one little ray of hope, that just now was fading away. Where was her guardian angel that moment? Where the last mercy, that would drag her, despite herself, from that retreat, and fling her on her knees for pardon from the man she had so foully wronged?

Alas! these things are beyond our ken. During ten long minutes of grace he stood there, unconscious of the presence near him, listening, half in a dream, to the music that came from the river and the night silences. Then he passed into the house, and turned the key in the door. It was to her, poor soul! the rolling to of heaven's gates—the crash and clangour of bolts and locks that shut her out of Paradise for ever.

In the grey dawn of the morning, the water bailiff, who was coming home from his night-rounds on the river, saw something black, where the river lipped the sands, just below the deep hole called the Bulwarks. He went towards it and turned it over with his foot. Before nine o'clock it was known to every man, woman, and child in town that Abbey Walsh, the per-

jured and suborned girl, had been drowned. Crowds came to look at the black heap lying on the grey sands, but no one touched it; and there it lay, the March sunshine playing on it, and making its own lustre among the black, wet garments, while the river came up like a dog which, having killed its prey, returns to worry the dead bird or beast, and lifted one cold hand, and washed around the naked feet, and played with the black fringe that fell from the shawl of the dead girl. It was only when the dusk was falling that the Priest heard of this frightful thing, and he hurried down to the big meadow, and very soon stood amongst a curious but most irreverent throng.

"We was only waiting for your Reverence, to see her, till we threw her back into the river," said big Dave, the smith, black, brawny, and fiercely and aggressively honest.

"I'm surprised at you, Dave," said the Priest gently. "You weren't at Mass on Sunday."

Dave looked confused. And the Priest, moving down along the sand, stood over the dead.

"Such of you," he said, with just a suspicion of contempt in his voice, "as were at Mass on Sunday, may remember the Gospel I read and

the remark I made. There may be outcasts from the bosom of God—sheep whom the Good Shepherd had not found. But it would be the wildest presumption in you or me to judge those whom, perhaps, God Himself may judge only with a heart of compassion. I told you, I think, that the Master stooped down and wrote on the sands. So do I.”

He stooped, and with his fingers drew letters on the sand, but the tradition is that each letter disappeared as he finished it, and to this day it is a matter of conjecture what the letters signified, and many a fierce debate has taken place in forge and tavern as to what the Priest wrote on the strand near the Bulwarks.

“Now I said to you,” continued the Priest, raising himself, as he stood head and shoulders over the tallest man present, “that what the Master wrote we shall see. We have seen something,” he said, pointing to the dead figure : “whether it is His justice or His mercy we do not know. But we shall see more. Go, Dave, and fetch a coffin.” He walked up and down the sands, reading his Breviary, till the men returned. “Now raise this poor girl, and remember the Magdalen and Christ.”

But not a man stood forward. Their horror and their dread were beyond their compassion. They stared at this man, who was giving them such unpleasant shocks, and they sullenly shook their heads. "Touch her! God forbid. Our children and our children's children would never forgive us."

Then the Priest took off his great frieze coat and went over and knelt down by the prostrate figure.

"Oh, don't. Oh, don't! your Reverence!" wailed the women. Then they turned angrily on the men. "You big, lazy hounds, don't you see what his Reverence is doing?"

Two or three big, hulking fellows stepped forward. But the Priest waved them back, and gently putting his strong arms around the dead girl he raised her up and moved towards the rude coffin. As he did so her head fell back, and one arm dropping down, a paper fell from her hand, and five bright, wet guineas rolled upon the sand. One little, ragged urchin leaped forward to seize the prize, but big Dave caught him by the collar and swung him six feet away among the ferns, saying—

"You little cur. You'd take her blood money, would you?" So there the guineas lay, bright and

round, under the steely sky, but though many an eye hungered after them, no hand would touch them.

Meanwhile the Priest had lifted up the drooping head, from which the long black hair was weeping, and, placing his hand under the neck, drew the face upwards. And men will swear to this day that the eyes of the dead opened on his face, and that the white lips moved to thank him. But he, the "Kalos Poimēn," the beautiful shepherd, whose prototype was so familiar to the haunted Christians of the Catacombs, saw nothing, but reverently placed the poor dripping figure in the coffin, reverently straightened the head and covered the naked feet, and then placed and fastened down the lid.

"Perhaps," he said, with the slightest touch of sarcasm, "you expect me to take the coffin to the grave?" But those fierce people were beginning to be awed by this wonderful man—more awed than ever they were by his thunders from the Altar, or the fierce invectives that he exulted to pour forth against the enemies of his Church and people. With shamed faces, four men stepped forward and slung the coffin on their shoulders. The Priest moved to the front, and a wondering crowd followed.

When they emerged into the main thoroughfare there was again a pretence at rebellion.

"To the Banfield, I suppose, your Reverence?" said the coffin-bearers. The Banfield was the local Aceldama, the place for the nameless and outcast dead.

"Certainly not," he replied, without looking back; "down to the churchyard."

To the churchyard, where their own dead reposed—their decent fathers and mothers and children! To place this perjured suicide among the good Catholic dead! What next?

With head bent and hands firmly clasped behind his back, the Priest moved on. Great pity filled his heart. The thought of that woman's wail last night, his own possible neglect in not seeking her and saving her; the splendid chance of salvation which was held out to her, and which was snapped, perhaps, by his stupidity or negligence; the remembrance of that upturned face, so beautiful, so pitiful, even the little human feeling of patronage and protection (almost the only human feeling a Priest is permitted to entertain), as the head of the dead girl rested against his breast,—all these things filled him with such pity and divine love that

he almost forgot his own wrongs. But, then, Irish priests are fatalists. They are so habituated to the drama of relentless iniquity that is always going on around them—the striking of the feeble with the mailed hand, the chaining of the captive to the victor's car, the sleek, hypocritical but unbending despotism, under which the helpless victims hopelessly writhe; the utter despair of all, as destiny for ever mockingly destroys them,—all these things make the Irish priest patient under circumstances that ordinarily drive men to madness. He has to lean on some dim philosophy that the wrong side of the tapestry, with blurred figures and ugly colours, is turned towards him; and that it is only when he goes above and looks down he will see how fair were the patterns of the Almighty, how brilliant His colours, how faultless His designs.

Some such thoughts ran through the Priest's mind as he passed down the thronged street, while the crowds looked at him and wondered. Then one wave of awful indignation against his pursuers swept these tender thoughts away. But he tried to suppress it. And it was then, while yet quivering under its excitement, he

approached the gate that led to the graveyard, that some one came to him and said—

“They have locked the gate.”

He looked up. The gate that opened into the avenue that led down to the Protestant church, around which were located the resting-places of the parishioners for six hundred years, since the old Abbey was founded, was locked and chained. The sight of this new assertion of supremacy goaded him to anger.

“They drove her to death,” he said, “and they refuse her a grave!”

And running down the little steep, he struck the iron gate with his shoulder, flinging all his strength into the assault. The rotten chain parted, the lock was smashed in pieces, and with a suppressed cheer of triumph the people swept into the broad avenue. They chose a quiet, green spot for her burial, down near the wall that cuts off the big meadow. There the Priest's mind went back to the little child that had learned “Hail Marys” at his knee; to the young girl that had received her first Communion from his hands, to the bright young woman who was the idol of her father, to the wailing soul around his house last night, to the

poor suicide by the river's brink—to this poor coffin, this lonely grave; and he said as he turned to his little cottage—

“Thy ways are upon the seas, and Thy pathway on the waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.”

IV

The quick impulsiveness of the Celtic nature hates the silence of mystery and dreads it. It is eager to get behind the veil, and it will sometimes drag it down to discover its secrets, but always with a dread that the discovery may lead to something uncanny and unwholesome.

The impatience of the people, therefore, in this little drama, to hear what their Priest was going to do, had reached its culminating point on the Sunday morning after the discovery of the dead body by the river; and at last Mass on that day the congregation was a dense, close mass of humanity that pressed against the iron rails of the sanctuary, was packed against the walls and pillars, and overflowed beyond the precincts of the spacious church far out to the gate that opened on the street. Crowds had

come in from the country districts, strong, prosperous farmers on their horses; labourers with rough, red breasts opened freely to the March winds, with just a pretence of protection in a rough, homespun jacket of flannel, tied in a knot at the waist; tradesmen with some distinguishing mark of their occupation; a crowd of women and girls drawn thither by curiosity and fear. And one hope was in all hearts, that this day the avenging hand of the Almighty would be explained and a clear forecast of future impending judgments be given.

There was something very like a smile around the firm, curving lips of the Priest when he turned towards his people at the Post-Communion of the Mass. He knew what was expected, and he knew they were going to be disappointed. He read a long list of names of deceased persons to be prayed for, and he closed the list with the name of Abina Walsh, who died during the week. Usually a deep murmur of prayer follows such announcements in the Irish churches. This day there was a sullen silence. The Priest looked them over calmly for a moment, rolling between his fingers the list of names. Then he said—

“How often have I told you, in the words of our Divine Master: You believe in God, believe in me. You might have learned this past week that God’s arm is not foreshortened, nor His eye made blind to the iniquity that pursues us. Yet you forget. Your solicitude for me blinds your faith in God. Fear not, for I have no fear. I do not miscalculate the malice, nor the power underlying that malice that seeks my life—or, what is dearer than life, my honour. But so far as this little drama has proceeded the machinations of my enemies have been checked, and God, and I, His unworthy servant, have been justified. What the future will bring forth I know not; but I know He in whom I trust will deliver me from the toils of the hunters and the bitter word. It is not for myself, it is for you I am solicitous. It has come to my knowledge that several young men amongst you contemplate violence next Tuesday, should an adverse decision be given against me on evidence which may again be suborned. I beg of you, as you love me, I implore you to desist from any demonstration of force on that day. I know that you will only be playing into the hands of your enemies.

Large forces will be drafted into town next Tuesday. I don't want to see you falling under the sabres of troopers or the musket-butts of yeomen. Believe me all will be right. God will justify me, and before the red sun sets you will know who hath the power—the unseen Judge of the living and the dead, or the hirelings of perjurers and despots.”

A deep breath was drawn when he had concluded. The women were satisfied—their faith always leaps highest. The men were not. They hated this mystery. They hoped he would appeal to their manhood to defend him. They grudged the defence to God. And when the Priest, about to leave the altar, turned once more to exact a promise that there should be no violence, the young men sidled out of the church, and to the request that all hands should be raised in promise, only a few trembling old men raised their half-palsied hands and instantly lowered them.

And so there was no surprise on the eventful day when, every shop shuttered, every door closed, the streets were paraded by bodies of young men, who walked with a kind of military precision, but apparently had no weapons of offence.

Those who were in the secret understood that in yards and recesses arms were piled. And when a phalanx of labourers entered the town from the north and took up their places in front of the Courthouse, leaning, as is their wont, on their spades, every one knew that these light spade handles were never intended to battle with the brown earth, and that somewhere away in these voluminous flannel vests the Croppy-pike with its sharp lance, the hook to drag down the hussar, and the sharp axe to cut the bridle were hidden. And it may be said that no fear, but the joy of battle, filled these honest hearts when, just at ten o'clock, a troop of dragoons, with drawn sabres, moved slowly down the main street and drew up in two lines close to the demesne wall and opposite the Courthouse. The soldiers were good-humoured and laughed and chatted gaily. Their officers looked grave. So did the mounted yeomen that acted as a bodyguard to the magistrates, who, under the sullen frowns and muttered curses of the people, took their way up the hill to the trial that was to be eventful for them. But there were no shouts of execration, no hysterical demonstrations of hate.

Neither was a single shout raised when the Priest moved slowly through the thick masses of the people. But every hat was raised, and the women murmured, "God bring him safe from his enemies!" For it was generally supposed that the indictment would not fail, even though the principal witness was dead—there was a deep suspicion that some clever machination would yet involve their beloved Priest with the law; and "you know, Clayton is the devil painted, and he can do what he likes with the rest." It was some surprise, therefore, to find that Clayton had not yet appeared. Eleven o'clock struck. The crowds that crammed the Courthouse began to grow curious. It was the scene of last Tuesday repeated—anxious Magistrates, a bewildered clerk, a jeering, sullen crowd, one calm figure—but the central seat on the Bench was empty.

At last the case was called: "The King v. Rev. Thomas Duan." The prosecutor arose, mumbled something about withdrawing the case, he understood witness—the chief witness—could not appear, &c. The Magistrates declared the case dismissed. The crowd, taken by surprise, looked stupidly at the Bench and at one an-

L

other. Then a shout arose that made the old roof tremble, and filled the court ; it was taken up outside, and the cavalry drew their bridles and backed their horses and clutched their sabres, as the roar of triumph was taken up and passed from lip to lip, until the hoarse murmur filled the air and the people seemed to have gone mad with joy.

In the Courthouse, however, not one stirred. The Magistrates on the bench looked as if glued to their seats ; the people waited the signal from their hero. He rose slowly and said in his quiet, emphatic way :

“ You say the case is dismissed. The prisoner is not dismissed as yet.”

“ Oh yes,” said the Magistrate, “ you may go.”

“ Thank you,” he said contemptuously. Then knitting his brows, he bent them on the quailing justices, and in a voice full of wrath and indignation he cried :

“ I took a solemn oath before the Most High God last Tuesday that I would deliver myself into Clayton’s hands for trial to-day. We held the Book of the Gospels together, and my hand touched his. I am bound by that oath to

deliver myself into his hands to-day. Where is he ? ”

“ We don’t know,” replied the Magistrates.
“ He is not here.”

“ Then I go to seek him,” said the Priest turning to the door.

The vast multitude poured out after him, as, with long strides, he passed down the hillside and emerged on the square. Here the shouting was again taken up, hats were waved—but all were stilled into silence when they saw the grave man moving rapidly onward, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and an awed and silent multitude following.

Then the whole crowd fell into line, and, with wondering eyes and parted lips, followed the Priest.

V

The Main Street is a long, narrow street, curving in a crescent from the bridge, and extending probably about a mile from the extreme end where the Courthouse was situated to Annabella House, the residence of the Magistrate, Mr. Clayton. Silent, but tumultuous in their actions and

motions, wondering, curious, afraid, the great crowd poured in a rapid stream, swelled here and there by contingents from narrow lanes and side streets.

The Priest walked a few paces in front. No one spoke to him. He moved along quickly, as one questing for some object that might evade him, his head erect, and the ordinary pallor of his face heightened by a pale pink flush. In less than ten minutes he stood at the iron gate that led into the park, and the multitude swept round him in curves that gradually thickened into one compact mass of humanity. It was a bright March morning. The black buds were just breaking into tiny beads of soft green. A heavy dew lay on the grass, and was smoking under the sun's rays, except where the shadows of the elms fell. The house, a square mansion, without pretensions to architecture, looked very white in the morning light, and the shuttered windows stared, like the white eyes of a blind man, at the sky.

"No man passes this gate but myself," said the Priest. "I go alone to see what awaits me."

A murmur of disappointment trembled through the crowd, and some ragged youngsters, to

console themselves, clambered on the walls, from which they were instantly dislodged. The Priest closed the gate and moved along the gravelled walk to the house. The blinds were down and the shutters closed. He knocked gently. No answer. Then imperiously, and a footman appeared.

"I want to see your master, Mr. Clayton."

"You cannot see him," said the man angrily.

"I insist upon seeing him," said the Priest;
"I have an engagement with him."

"You cannot see him," said the man nervously.

"Take him my message," said the Priest.
"Say that Thomas Duan, priest and prisoner, must see him."

"Take your own message, then!" cried the man, as he passed into the kitchen.

The Priest walked upstairs, whither the man had pointed. He paused on the lobby uncertainly, then pushed open a half-closed door and entered. The room was dark. He opened the shutters and drew the blind. Then even his great nerve gave way. For, lying on the white coverlet, his head shattered into an undistinguishable mass of bone and blood, his brains blackening the white wall behind his

pillow, his right hand clutching a heavy pistol, was Clayton ; and there, on the floor, was the mouldering, disinterred corpse of Abina Walsh, the face just darkening in incipient decomposition, and the brown earth clinging to her bare feet and black clothes.

The Priest could not restrain a cry of horror as he rushed from that awful chamber of death. Whatever he had expected, it was his intention to give himself up formally into the custody of his enemy by placing his right hand on Clayton's and interlocking his fingers, as had happened on the day when he took the oath. But all other feelings vanished at the dreadful spectacle he had just witnessed. Full of horror and self-humiliation at the sight of such awful retribution, he passed rapidly to the gate. Then raising his sonorous voice to its fullest pitch, he said to the expectant multitude :

“Go back to your homes and fall upon your knees to implore God's mercy. And let them who have touched the dead beware !” Then, in a lower voice he said, almost to himself, “I know not which is more dreadful—the wrath of God or the vengeance of man !”

For years Annabella House lay untenanted.

It was believed that no human power could wash away the dread blood stains on the wall. Paint and lime were tried in vain. Even when the mortar was scraped away the red stains appeared on the masonry. About thirty years ago it was pulled down, and the green grass is now growing on the foundations of a once famous mansion.

HOW THE ANGEL BECAME HAPPY

I

THE angel's name was Astraël.

He was not one of the great Archangels that stand close before the throne of God, nor did he belong to any of the seven orders of spirits, but his place was far down in the lower choirs, but directly facing the great white throne of the Lamb. He was one of the faithful few that smote and hurled from the battlements of heaven the fallen angels, when St. Michael raised his battle-cry, "Who is like unto God?" and from that time he had many chosen and delicate duties appointed him, all of which he discharged most faithfully for the love of his great King. For the first thousand years after the fall of the angels, he was charged with the care of a great beautiful star that was quenched when the angels fell, for you must know that every star in heaven is called after its angel; and the stars that belonged to the rebel angels

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were suddenly extinguished when God drove these unfaithful servants from heaven. Then they were re-lighted. So every night our angel had to fly through the fields of space, and light up this beautiful star, and hold it aloft in his great right hand, whilst he himself fronted the Almighty. Hence, he took his name Astraël, that is, angel of the star.

But after a thousand years his duties were changed. And for a thousand more he was charged with the duty of watching a great white lily, that budded and expanded from spring to summer, and was finally gathered and placed before the Blessed Sacrament. So every springtide he came upon earth, and drew up the tiny green shoot from the brown mould, and every day made it stronger, until at last the white petals would peep out from the green sheath. And then as it grew and broadened, and the white velvet leaves expanded, he had to keep it very pure and unstained, and ever and anon he shook his wings over it, and a beautiful perfume fell on the lily, and was wafted over the garden. At last it was tenderly cut, and placed in a beautiful vase, and our angel came with it into the silent chapel, and

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bent over it, and touched the leaves with his lips to keep them fresh, and then bent very low before the Tabernacle, and flew back to his place in heaven.

Now, our angel was not very happy out there amongst the great lonely stars; and, though he was much happier amongst his lilies, there was always a pain at his heart—a sad, melancholy feeling that he could not put aside. Because he saw day after day in the courts of heaven a strange thing take place. Several of his companions would return to their places after many years' absence, and many would return very sad, and he could see their eyes red from weeping, and notice that they always kept their wings closed, yet their hot tears would drop on the bright shining floors. But some would return, their faces full of joy, and now and again they would bring with them another beautiful spirit, not an angel, yet very like an angel, and Astraël was quite jealous to see the deep love and affection which his companions had for these souls. And he heard them called the "children of the angels," and the angels called their guardians. And he was hoping and praying every day that the great

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King would call him, and send him to earth, and give him such a precious charge; but hundreds of years rolled by, and Astraël was unnoticed.

It was the eve of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady; and there was great joy in heaven. They were all preparing to celebrate the feast of God's Holy Mother in a worthy manner; but Astraël noticed that there was the greatest eagerness to do honour to the great Queen amongst the children of the angels. Suddenly a bright thought struck him. He would ask the Blessed Virgin to grant him the great desire of his heart. He prayed for the favour. But he had no need of asking. For our Blessed Lady read his thoughts; and the morning had scarcely dawned, when he heard his name, "Astraël! Astraël!" shouted through the courts of heaven. He looked up in amaze. All eyes were turned to him. Suddenly there came flashing along the great choirs who bent humbly before him, a mighty Archangel, his broad wings extended, his hair flying like a cloud behind him, and he stood over Astraël, and said, "Follow me!" And Astraël rose, and followed him far up among the Cherubim and Seraphim, until at

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last a great light shone upon him, like the light of a thousand suns, and he covered his face with his hands, for he was blinded, and found himself standing face to face with the Queen of Heaven. Gabriel stood beside him. And his Queen spoke thus, and her voice was soft and gentle: "Astraël, I know the prayer of your heart. To-day it is granted to you. For to-day there is born on earth a child whom I place under your protection. She shall be called Mary. Bring her safe here to the foot of my throne to bless you and me for ever!"

Astraël thought he should have died from joy at this mark of favour from the great Queen. He could not speak, so he bowed very low; and, accompanied by Gabriel, shot down like an arrow from heaven, and passed out amongst the stars.

II

A dark and narrow lane in a crowded city, a tall house, black and begrimed from smoke, windows broken and patched with paper, a rickety staircase that led up and up ever so high to an attic, where the rafters, festooned

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with cobwebs, were plainly visible, and under the rafters a wooden box filled with a little straw, and on the straw a little babe just born—here is what Astraël saw when he had swept the bright skies and fluttered to the earth. It was a tiny babe, but very beautiful, with blue eyes that blinked at the light, and a little rosebud of a mouth, and pink fingers that opened and shut, and found nothing. And Astraël bent over the cradle lovingly, and fanned the babe with his great wings, and felt very happy. After a few days he stood beside the baptismal font, saw the white robe of innocence placed round the infant, and heard it called by the sweet name of “Mary.” Then he rested for seven years, gathering all his strength for the struggle which he knew was coming. Now and again he would sweep down to the earth, and whisper some things to the mother, and then she would clasp her child closer, and pray and pray that God would save her child from sin. And then, when Mary could walk, and was beginning to know the names of things, Astraël would teach her the names of Jesus and His Mother, and put little pictures in her way, and lead her sometimes into the quiet church, where

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she would sit for hours, the angel by her side, looking up and wondering at the pictures in the stained-glass window, at the statues of the Sacred Heart and the Madonna, and, above all, at the great crucifix that stood by the pulpit with the white figure upon it, and the red marks in the hands and feet and side. Somehow, she could scarcely tear herself away from the study of this crucifix. She would sit, her hands folded in her lap, her blue eyes wide open and sorrowful, gazing at the sad face and drooping figure, the wreath of thorns on the head, the black nails, the red blood. But above all, the sad eyes of the figure haunted her. She thought they were looking straight into her own, and once or twice she thought she saw the lips parting, and heard the voice speaking, and she was going up to the crucifix, when her mother lifted her from the bench, and took her home, and said she was a strange child.

Now, the seven years went by, and the struggle commenced. One day, when Astraël, full of joy, had entered the little room, he saw sitting close by Mary a dark spirit, in whose eyes there was a baleful fire, but who spoke so softly, so sweetly, that the angel Astraël was deceived, until he

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saw on the forehead of the spirit the red mark that denoted eternal reprobation. He was face to face, the first time for several thousand years, with a fallen spirit. He trembled, but recovered himself, and took his usual place by Mary's side. But, when he looked on the child, he was frightened. The sweet look of peace had died away from the blue eyes, which were now troubled, the face was hot and flushed, and the hands that had lain so peacefully together were clenched and moistened. Some dark thought was in the mind of the child. It was the first temptation. The dark spirit spoke, and the face became more clouded. He brought up before the mind of the child some hard words that had passed in school between the children that day, and he touched with his dark finger a red burning spot where a little girl had struck Mary's cheek in her anger. He prompted her to revenge, told her how sweet it would be to strike back again, and how her companions would applaud her. The child's face grew darker and darker; the crimson on her cheek grew brighter and brighter.

Astraël was in despair, and in despair he cried aloud to his Queen to assist him. That

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moment the mother entered. She had on her shawl and bonnet. She had returned from market, and thought she would pay a visit to the church. She called to Mary to come ; but Mary did not heed her. She came over and shook the child, and then, seeing her burning face and her eyes bloodshot, she cried out with a great cry, fearing that her child was sick. And, snatching her up hastily, she fled to the church, flung herself at the feet of the crucifix, and cried to God with all her heart to save her child. Now, the child was saved ; but not, as the mother thought, from death, but from sin. For no sooner had Mary seen the crucifix, and looked into the sorrowful eyes that seemed ever so sad to-day, and recollected all that she had heard of the sufferings of her Saviour, than her heart was broken with sorrow, and she felt a great lump in her throat, and she leaned on her mother and wept bitterly.

III

Now, months and years rolled by, and everything seemed to go smoothly with Mary, but it was a terrible and anxious time for her angel.

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If he never left her side, even for an instant, neither did the dark spirit. And no one can suspect what an awful conflict was being waged around the soul of that little child. Daily she went to school, her face shining, her yellow curls tossed over her shoulders, her blue eyes looking before her, and above her; and within her was raging the conflict of sin and grace, of darkness and light. How watchful all the time her good angel was! How carefully he removed from her way the snares that were laid for her by the enemy; how often he laid his fingers softly over her eyes, lest they should stray from curiosity into danger; how often he closed her lips when she was tempted to utter angry words; and how tenderly he put her hands together, and guarded the wandering mind when she knelt at prayer, and gave up her soul to God!

These last were happy times for Astraël. They were the only moments of relief he enjoyed during the day. When the mother took Mary to morning Mass, or to evening Benediction, Astraël could go aside into some private chapel, and join his brother angels in the canticle of triumph that goes up everlastingly from the

M

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choirs of angels, both in heaven and upon earth. But these were brief moments. The instant Mary set foot outside the church, the angel's charge commenced again, and lasted through the day, and even into the watches of the night. For even when darkness was upon the face of nature, darkness unbroken save by the silver lamps which the angels hung out in heaven, and when the restless eyes of the world were closed, and Mary amongst other children of humanity breathed peacefully in her little cot, Astraël stood watching, his broad wings closed, and himself motionless except for the night wind that lifted now and again his long hair from his shoulders. It was a beautiful sight—the angel and the child. Mary peacefully breathing in the calm sleep of childhood, her yellow hair tossed over the pillow, like threads of gold, and her face calm and beautiful. The angel looking at her intently, dreaming of the time when she would be a saint in heaven, and he would claim her as his child, and now and again turning from her to look up into the eyes of the stars, and thinking of the bright courts above them.

In childhood time passes quickly, because it

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is a period of enjoyment. The days flew by rapidly, and whenever her birthday came round, Mary wondered how a year could seem so short. At last one morning she awoke, and her mother kissed her, and some little friend sent her a pretty book, and on the inner page was written : " To Mary on her eleventh birthday." " Eleven ! Can it be possible ? " thought Mary. " Why I am quite an old woman," and she ran rapidly to the looking-glass ; but there was not a single grey hair in her yellow plaits, not a single wrinkle in the pink cheeks ; but, all the same, Mary looked very grave, for she felt life was commencing in earnest, and when she knelt down that morning she said with double fervour that beautiful prayer to her guardian : " O Angel of God, to whose holy care I am committed," &c.

But there was something else that made our child very grave, yet very happy this morning. For the great event of her childhood, her First Communion, had been deferred until her eleventh year. Mary was one of the quickest in her class. She was not only studious, but God had given her great gifts, and she had not only mastered her Catechism, but she knew the

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meaning of every word, and could sometimes give a little lecture of her own on the mysteries of our holy faith. But it was thought better to wait until she was a little more grown, that she might have more time to prepare carefully for the great day of First Communion. But now that she was eleven, there was no further obstacle in the way, and hence was she very grave, very serious, but very happy on this birthday morning.

The next few months flew rapidly by. It was midsummer, and one morning when the sun was shining ever so warmly on the earth, and the air was full of the incense which the flowers sent up towards heaven, sixty children assembled in their parochial church to make their First Communion.

There was a vast number of people present, the mothers and sisters of the children, and what they saw was this : Six rows of children, all dressed in white with blue sashes, with veils over their heads, and flowers and candles in their hands ; and they looked so serious, yet so happy, that many aged persons felt themselves deeply touched, and sometimes a tear would gather and steal down the furrowed cheeks of some who remembered their own First Communion of long ago, and thought of the many

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things that had happened since then. But I saw something more than the people. For I saw amongst the ranks of the children many bright spirits that stood motionless and silent, each watching his precious charge, and amongst them I recognised Astraël, looking ever so happy and so bright, as he bent over Mary's golden hair, and whispered to her many beautiful things of God and the Blessed Sacrament, and the Holy Mother. Not a trace was there of the dark spirits this morning. They dared not come into so holy a place; and as the angels hovered over their precious charges, I could not see a trace of anxiety on their faces. They seemed as happy as the children.

Well, the Mass went on. The children had approached the altar rails, and had now returned to their places, when I saw Astraël arise and leave Mary's side, and hovering in the air for an instant, I saw him kneeling before a statue of the Virgin and Child that was placed in one of the side-chapels. For a while he was motionless. He then passed his hand slowly across his forehead as if he were thinking whether he was going to do what was right. At last he fully made up his mind, and, with his

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hands clasped, and his eyes fixed on the statue of his Queen, he prayed ever so earnestly—that Mary might die !

What a terrible thing, you will say ; but nevertheless it is true. He prayed that Mary might die in her perfect innocence. He thought of the past, of the first temptation, of the risks that Mary ran, of the narrow escape from sin she had had ; he thought of heaven, and how certainly now Mary would be admitted there ; he thought of the angels whom he had sometimes seen returning, and whose hot tears fell on the shining floors of the heavenly city, and he shuddered and trembled to think that this might possibly be his own fate if Mary should live, and he prayed ever so earnestly that his Queen would now take her child to heaven in her innocence ; and, strange to say, his prayer was heard, for he saw distinctly the statue bend its head towards him ; and, full of joy, he flew back and once more took his place at the side of Mary.

IV

There were a few days of rejoicing, of intense piety and happiness, and then Mary felt a

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strange languor creep over her. The hand of the great dark angel, called Death, was laid upon her.

She struggled against it, became more gay and playful than ever for a while, but the angel was too strong for her, and gradually she faded away. The roses disappeared from her cheeks, her quick, elastic step became slow and heavy, her breathing became very difficult, and she often felt inclined to lie down and rest, though she had done nothing to tire herself. Her mother, for a while, shut her eyes to Mary's illness, but one day, whilst the child was bending over the fire, there came upon her a sharp, dry cough, that shook her and made her tremble all over ; and the mother started from her seat, and then resumed her work, but a great lump gathered in her throat, and a big tear slowly filled, and fell upon her hand. But when Mary asked, "What is the matter, mamma ?" she said nothing, but proceeded with her work.

And now Mary felt a strange longing for solitude. The noise of the children in the streets distressed her, and she would steal away from her playmates, and hide herself behind the pillars of the church, turning over and over the

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leaves of the prayer-book, or the beads of the Rosary. Her favourite spot was before that very statue near which Astraël had prayed for her death. And her angel, when he saw her there, her white face lifted up towards our Blessed Lady, her thin fingers rolling the beads, and death, all the time, stealing away her life, felt a kind of remorse and pain, because he had prayed that the great Queen might take her to heaven. And so the days went on, and every day Mary grew more weak and pale and thin, and the cough became worse, until at last she could no longer move of herself, but her mother used to lift her, and place her on the sofa, and put before her a picture of her dear Madonna, which she had won as a prize at school. And now came a time when Astraël had to pray and watch without ceasing. For now the dark spirit redoubled his attacks on the soul of the child, and seven other spirits, worse than himself, were there, to tempt the poor child to sin. But prayer and holy inspirations, and pious thoughts came to help her, and the grace which she had received in her First Communion was there untouched and undiminished.

At last the great harvest feast of our Lady

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came round. It was again the eve of the Assumption. All the children were to go to Holy Communion in the morning ; and Mary, now brought very low, yearned to go with the rest, and kneel at the Holy Altar, where she had received such graces before. She asked her mother might she go ; but her mother shook her head sadly. She promised, however, that early in the morning, immediately after the first Mass, the priest should come to her. That night the angel never stirred from his post by the foot of Mary's bed. Deep down by the corners of the walls, and up in the corners of the ceiling, were myriads of dark spirits, crouching and afraid, yet with baleful eyes fixed on the dying girl. They dared not approach. For Astraël, with wings stretched out and head bowed down, held a long sword of flame, extended along Mary's couch, and it quivered and shone in the darkness, and its bright light was a terror to the spirits of evil. And there was the angel, calm, silent, quiet, but determined that no harm should reach that soul which he had kept pure till now.

The morning dawned bright and warm. The deep bell tolling for Mass awoke Mary, and for the last time she whispered her prayer to her

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Angel Guardian. Her thoughts went out to the church, and the groups of happy communicants ; and, as the music of the hymns which the children sang came into her memory, she could not help crying very softly to herself. And then her mother came, and put on her white dress and blue sash, and placed on her head the wreath of flowers that she had worn before, and as she lay in her bed, very peaceful and very happy, the tinkling of a little bell stole into her ears, and she knew that her Lord was coming to her. How the dark angels trembled and feared, and pushed each other against the walls, as the priest mounted the stairs and deposited on the table the sacred vessel that contained Our Lord ! And when, kneeling lowly, he uncovered it, Astraël sheathed his sword of flame, and drew in and covered his face with his wings, for even he dared not look on the Holy One, the Mighty, “before whom the stars are not pure.” But Mary, propped with pillows, her hands clasped, her eyes shining, received her Lord meekly and holily, and then, shutting her eyes, lay back very peaceful and very happy. And now Extreme Unction was administered, and the Plenary Indulgence imparted, and the

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priest passed away. But Astraël stirred not, but kept his watch.

The day wore on. Many prayers were offered up for the dying child, she herself slumbering peacefully. Murmurs rose all day long round the bedside; murmurs of supplication to the throne of heaven for the sweet child whom every one loved for her meekness and sanctity. Her schoolmates came in during the afternoon in their white dresses. They came to say a last word to their dear companion. But when they saw her sleeping so calmly they would not disturb her, but each of them in turn put a little offering of flowers on the bed, and kissed the white lips, and said "Good-bye, Mary!"

Evening came. High up in the sky the clouds were piled. You could see them plainly from Mary's bed in the attic; and they were turned all red and purple and gold by the rays of the setting sun; six o'clock came, and in a few seconds the Angelus Bell rang out its three clear notes. Mary started up, and looked round frightened. In a moment her mother's arm was around her.

"Where am I, mamma?" said she.

"Here, my child, at home," said the mother.

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“ And those flowers, what brought them here ? ” said Mary feeling the leaves, to assure herself that they were real.

“ Your companions brought them, my child,” said the mother.

“ Because—because,” said the dying girl, passing her hand slowly over her forehead, “ because I was dreaming, and I thought that I saw the Blessed Virgin in the heavens, seated on a golden throne amongst the clouds, just like them,” pointing to the red clouds piled above her window, “ and there was a multitude of angels with her, and there was one I knew—at least, I thought I knew—and he looked at me so kindly, and he flung these flowers at me, and then—and then ”—her breathing came very fast—“ and then—our Lady—beckoned to me, and I was just—rising—up—to go to her, and then—and then—and then ”—the rosy clouds threw a beautiful light on her face, then came a white shadow, and the eyes closed and the lips parted in a smile ; and the mother, sobbing, bent down and kissed the poor white lips, and said, as the last tones of the Angelus were lingering in the air, “ And then, my pet, our Lady took you safe to her home in heaven.”

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But that wasn't quite right, for I saw Astraël with a look of joy I shall remember for ever, put his sword into its sheath, and clasping the beautiful soul of the child in his arms, he sped upwards through the rosy clouds, cleaving the light air with every pulsation of his wings, and singing a carol of triumph, that made the lark, who was enjoying his evening song, quite ashamed, and fly down to his little ones in the nest.

Wasn't there joy in heaven, as Astraël, with his precious charge, stood once more on the shining floors! How the angels smiled and welcomed him; and then made a long avenue for him and Mary, as they sped up and up and to the great White Throne of the Judge. And how did Astraël feel when, passing the throne of our Lady, she smiled on him, and said, "Well done, good and faithful Astraël!" and when, still farther up, he placed his precious charge before the Judgment Seat; and without a word of examination, the Eternal Word took the child and presented her to the Father and to the Holy Ghost.

The mother was weeping by the little bed, on which lay the lifeless body of her child. She

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had composed the arms on the bosom, and placed a crucifix between them, and ever and anon she hid her face in the bedclothes, and murmured, "God help me this holy night." She didn't understand that her child was standing bright and beautiful, amongst the heavenly choirs, nor that there was an angel, named Astraël, who would not be contented with stars and flowers, but he had a child given him, and he had saved her, and that child was Mary.

And this was how the angel became happy.

FRANK FORREST'S MINCE-PIE

I

"I DECLARE, Frank," said Mrs. Forrest, "that is the fourth mince-pie you have eaten this evening. I am afraid, my boy, they will make you ill, so put away this one until to-morrow."

Frank knew not how to disobey his beloved mother; so he promptly took up the delicacy, and placed it in the cupboard. It was Christmas Eve. Presently a feeble, timid knock was heard; and, as cook was ever so busy preparing tarts and pies for the morrow, Frank ran to the door and opened it. A gust of sleety wind nearly lifted him from his feet, and a few snowflakes fell softly on the floor, and melted slowly on the carpet in the hall.

"Something for the children," said a weak, faltering voice; and Frank saw before him a pale, delicate woman shivering in the icy wind. She had a child in her arms, looking sickly, and the snow had made a little crown for his

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head on the cloak which his mother had wrapped around him. She held another child by the hand, and its little rags flapped and fluttered, as the cruel storm tossed them, and pierced the little limbs with its icy needles.

"Stop a moment," said Frank, who was a rough, brusque, manly lad, but had tender feelings, though he was unconscious of possessing them. In a few moments he returned with the following miscellany, several buns, scraps of cold meat, a paper of tea, a paper of soft sugar, a bunch of raisins, a wooden monkey on a stick, a battered doll, and, crowning all, his own mince-pie which he had put away for the morrow.

"God bless you, dear," said the woman, as she opened her apron and wrapped up all these treasures; and a smile flashed across her face and lighted up her eyes, as if an angel had rushed by and touched and transfigured her.

Nine o'clock came, and Frank sat by his bedroom fire, watching the flames dancing and leaping, and gambolling around the bars. Then, slowly and reluctantly, he pulled off one shoe after another, and soon found himself nestling in his little cot, listening to the wild storm that shook the windows, and wondering where were

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the children resting whom he had seen that afternoon. Softly sleep stole upon him, and he closed his eyes in the peaceful slumber of boyhood.

Boom — boom — boom. It was the great Cathedral bell swinging out the midnight hour, and sending its welcome tones on the wings of the storm. Frank started up.

Ding - dong, ding - dong, ding - dong; and, mingling their sweet silvery notes with the deep booming, the joybells pealed out rapturously the Christmas chimes. Frank heard the hall-door open and shut, and he knew that mother was going through the storm to the midnight Mass. He rubbed his eyes, and looked around. Heigho! what's this? He rubbed his eyes again, then started up and leaned on his elbow. No doubt about it. There, in his own chair, opposite the fire, was a little old man, not a bit bigger than Frank himself. He held his hands before the fire, and Frank could see their dark shadows distinctly before the red embers. For a moment the boy was astonished, but presently his boyish daring and courage came back, and he shouted cheerily :

“Hallo! old fellow, a happy Christmas!”

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The stranger rose slowly, then came to the bedside, his two hands folded behind his back, and bending over the boy, he exclaimed, half-seriously, half-jestingly :

“ Ah ! you bad boy ! ”

“ I am *not* a bad boy,” said Frank, indignant at such an answer to his welcome, “ and you have no right to say so.”

“ Where’s my mince-pie ? ” said the old man, lifting up one finger, and shaking it warningly.

“ I am sure,” said Frank, “ I don’t know where’s your mince-pie ; but I gave mine to a poor woman.”

“ Ah ! you bad boy,” said the stranger again, as he slowly turned away and took up his seat by the fireplace.

But Frank knew that the old man did not mean what he said. Presently, his hand dived deep, deep down into his pocket, and he placed on the table, near Frank’s collars and cuffs, the very identical mince-pie which Frank had given the poor woman at the door. There it was, with its mitred edge, its brown crust, and the five currants which Frank had ordered the cook to place crosswise on the top. The old man

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lifted off the crust and placed it gently beside him.

“He’s going to eat it, the old glutton,” thought Frank; “he surely stole it from the poor woman.” But no! he simply lighted a match on the coals, and swiftly passed it round the edge of the pie before him. A bright blue flame shot upwards, flickering and flashing in the darkness till it reached the ceiling. Then it assumed gradually the form of a house on fire. The windows were shown clearly against the dark walls by the terrible flames within, and Frank could see the little spurts of fire that broke from the slates on the roof. Now there was a rumbling and the confused murmur of many voices, and the tramping of many feet, and a noise like the roaring of the sea. Then there was a wild shout, and a tiny jet of water rose like a thread from the crowd and scattered its showers upon the fire. Another shout, and the boy’s heart sank within him as he saw at the window of the burning house a young lad like himself, clad only in his night-dress, terror and agony on his face, and his arms flung wildly hither and thither. A cheer went up, and a ladder was planted firmly against the window,

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and a sailor lad swiftly ascended, and in a moment the little fluttering figure was grasped in the strong arms, and carried safely where gentle hands and warm hearts would protect him. Frank's heart was throbbing wildly, the perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead, when he heard the harsh voice of the old man :

“ Shut your eyes ! ”

Frank shut them, but kept one little corner open, and he saw the old man quietly taking up the crust and place it in the pie, completely extinguishing this awful conflagration. And the Christmas bells were chiming.

“ Shut your eyes ! ” said the old man again, quite angrily. And Frank shut them, and kept them closed for a long time, as he thought.

“ Look,” said the same voice.

Frank opened his eyes, fearing and wondering what new strange vision was going to burst on him. It was nothing terrible, however ; but somehow the mince-pie had expanded and grown into a deep and broad valley, with rugged rocks and strange dark places, and black mountains huddled together, and tossed about as if by an earthquake. And from their midst rose a mighty peak, the base of which was clothed with fir

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trees, and farther up were black frowning rocks, and the top was crowned by a pinnacle of snow that shot up high into the air, and was lost beyond the ceiling of the little bedroom. At the base of the mountain was a village, and there was a bustle in the village, and the noise of many tongues. In the street many mules were standing, laden with provisions, and three guides, tall and strong, and brown, strolled up and down, their alpenstocks in their hands, and huge coils of rope strung across their shoulders. Three young gentlemen stood apart, talking earnestly. They were young, scarcely more than boys, but there was vigour and courage in their looks, and gait and manner. They had not heard of the word "Danger!" At last one separated from the rest, and walked away quite dejected and angry. The word was given, and the two gentlemen and their guides set out to scale the mountain. They were watched until they turned the spur of the hill. Then one ringing cheer, and they disappeared in the shadows of the mountains. The day wore on, and evening came. But before the twilight descended, Frank saw that people came from their houses with long telescopes, and levelled

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them at the snowy summit. Nothing was visible there, as Frank could see, but the cold, hard, glittering snow, shining pink and ruby from the reflections of the fire. Suddenly there was a shout: "There they are!" Frank looked, and thought he saw five tiny black specks in the snow, linked together by a thread. Slowly these specks moved up the slippery surface until they were lost in the clouds. A few minutes those same black specks reappeared, toiling down the steep side of the mountain of ice. Frank held his breath. They had already travelled down half the mountain, when the lowest figure on the rope fell, and one after another the brave climbers were tossed from cliff to cliff, from precipice to precipice, until they were lost in the black valleys beneath. A cry of horror had gone up from the village. Frank shut his eyes, and put his fingers in his ears. After a few moments he looked again, and saw lights flashing in the village, and dark figures hurrying to and fro, and he felt they were going out to seek for the dead bodies of the guides and the two gentlemen. Presently a bell began to toll, and Frank thought it too cheerful for a funeral; for now down the slope

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of the hill, in amongst the trees, out across the valley, he saw the lights shining, and slowly the procession entered the village. Mountaineers, with their heads bent down, carried on their shoulders a bier, and on the bier was something covered with a black cloth. Behind them came a young man, whom Frank recognised as the companion, who was left behind in the morning. He was weeping silently, now and again passing his handkerchief across his face.

For one moment he raised his head, and the red light of the torches fell upon him, and Frank saw that it was himself, and he felt himself choking at the thought of his narrow escape from a terrible death. He lay for a while thinking and thinking, when once more he saw the old man by the fire with the mince-pie on the table, but the vision of the valley was gone. But the Christmas chimes were ringing.

After a little while, once more the voice of the old man, now very gently and lovingly, said, "Shut your eyes!" Frank closed his eyes sorrowfully, for he felt very sad and frightened, and he dreaded another terrible picture.

"Now," said the old man, "you may look!"

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II

Timidly enough, Frank peered forth ; but how his heart bounded with joy when he saw his own beautiful harbour painted in its richest colourings of blue and gold, the sunshine streaming over its surface, and the little waves dancing and leaping and flashing. He looked for a long time out over the waters, but he heard the noise of laughter and talking quite close at hand, and he saw just beneath him a large, beautiful boat, and somehow he thought that this boat was but his mince-pie lengthened out and decorated. It was heaving and rocking on the water, and it had the straightest mast and the whitest sail in the world. And in the stern Frank saw quite a crowd of "fair women and brave men," and he knew them all as the friends of his boyhood, though they were changed. Stout watermen in blue jerseys were lifting hampers over the gunwale, and over all there was a something Frank never saw before. It was a joy and a peace and a glory as if reflected from some light brighter than the sunshine. But he himself was very sad. And they pitied him, and said, "Another

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time, Frank ; don't grieve too much." And then the oars were planted firmly on the gravel, and the boat was pushed away, and after a few strokes the sail was lifted, and the breeze caught it and carried the gay barque like a bird over the bright waters. Frank turned away sick and disappointed, but lo ! as he came along from the Admiralty Pier, he saw facing him the poor woman whom he had relieved and her children. But she was changed. She had on that strange look which passed across her face when the angel touched her, and her child was bright and ruddy, and held forth his hands to Frank, and the little girl, dressed ever so beautifully, caught Frank and bent him down towards her, and whispered something that Frank could not hear. But a strange peace stole over his heart, and all the sorrow and disappointment were gone.

But when the evening came and the lamp was lighted, and the books were opened, the same sadness stole into his heart. Suddenly there was a sharp ring, and a succession of knocks, and hurried whisperings at the door, and he heard his mother's voice saying, " My God ! " and then the door of his room opened, and his mother glided in, and her face was wet

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with tears, and Frank knew that the gay barque of the morning was drifting out a sad wreck into the high seas, and he knew also that his dear friends from whom he had parted so sadly in the morning were now lying cold and still on the sand and shingle down deep beneath the cold blue waters. But mother came near him, and flung her arms round him, and he heard her say :

“Why, Frank, you lazy boy, still in bed at eight o'clock Christmas morning. You promised to be first in the sacristy to bid Father Ambrose a happy Christmas ; and now you must wait for High Mass, and there's a pile of Christmas Cards waiting for you.”

Frank lay still a moment, collecting his thoughts, doubting all things, thinking all things a dream. But there was the white light of the Christmas snow shining in his room, and there was the bell ringing for Mass, and drawing a long sigh, he exclaimed :

“O mother, I had *such* a dream.”

“Never mind, my boy,” said his mother ;
“you can tell it by-and-by ! ”

And by-and-by, when the tables were cleared and they were sitting round the fire, and there

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was not a shadow of gloom on the gay little circle, Frank told his dream, his hand softly clasped by his mother. And when he had done, she smoothed away his fair locks from his forehead, and kissed him gently, and said :

“ It was not a dream, Frank, but a vision of dangers from which the good God will preserve my boy for his kindness to the little ones of Christ.”

TOPSY¹

TOPSY, you must know, is a little terrier, with the shaggiest coat of hair, the blackest eyes, and the pertest little nose in the world. Topsy is quite a genius. He not only possesses the small qualifications of ordinary dogs, such as fetching sticks, begging, &c., but he can balance biscuits on his nose, and catch them with extraordinary agility, carry letters and newspapers to the post, and take the market-basket in his mouth for the housekeeper. He also understands the science of numbers, and won't touch a crumb of bread until twelve is counted. He is a patriotic dog, with a green and gold collar of which he is evidently proud. And he can "die for the Pope," stretching himself at full length, and remaining perfectly quiet and rigid, until bidden to rise.

Topsy is the pet of the family, but he is my

¹ The first story written by Canon Sheehan.

special friend. I am a physician ; and when I return in the evening from my sick calls, up he jumps from the garden seat, on which he is usually rolled up like a ball, and frisking, yelping, and throwing somersaults, he flies forward to welcome me, and then rushes to the house to apprise the family of my arrival. At dinner, he sits patiently on the hearthrug, accepting gratefully the morsels that fall to his lot ; and when the children retire for the night, and I draw my easy-chair to the fire, and trim the lamp, and open my favourite book, Topsy is my constant companion. This is explained when I mention that I picked up Topsy one day on the streets of London. It appears he had been stolen from a lady, who was very fond of him, and had been thrown away by the thief. He was dirty and draggled, wet and starving, when I whistled to him. He came, and since that time has been an inmate of our house, and a very pleasant and grateful one indeed.

Lately, however, I began to notice a change. Something evidently was wrong with Topsy. He came at my call as usual, but in a slow, depressed kind of way, that showed he was entirely out of spirits. He began to be fond of going

by himself into the stable, and lying on the hay asleep during the day. He shunned the house, and even turned away from the little dainties that were placed before him to eat. This was the case for a fortnight or so. I began to think he was sick. But no! There were no symptoms of illness about him. So I thought I would solve the difficulty by putting the question plainly to him. There is nothing like an explanation. A few words often settle little differences, that may possibly grow into serious disputes.

So last Saturday evening, when the drawing-room was cleared out and the little ones, after rubbing their eyes and crying for being sent to bed so soon, were safely nestled in their cots in the nursery, I determined to argue out the question with Topsy. So I lighted the lamp, turned it on fully, and began :

“Topsy!” He got up, stretched himself, yawned, and waited.

“Tops,” said I, “get up here, old fellow,” pointing to a chair, which I drew near myself. He jumped up, and for the first time for many days he faintly wagged his tail.

“Tops,” said I, “there’s something wrong.

Now you and I are friends. Out with it, and let us see if we cannot make matters straight."

"There's nothing wrong, sir," said Topsy, looking very serious.

"Tops," said I, "you cannot deceive me. You know I am accustomed to study people, and it takes only a glance sometimes to see that something is wrong in health or spirits. Now, you who were the friskiest and liveliest little dog in the world are getting quite stupid. You mope about, and refuse to eat, and, in short, you are not a bit like yourself. What's wrong ?

"Nothing, sir," said Topsy, looking down and studying his toes.

"Now, look here, Tops," said I looking very stern, "there ~~is~~ something wrong, and people are saying it. Now I know you well, and I don't believe what people are saying about you."

"What are they saying ?" said Topsy, indignantly, and looking me full in the face.

"Well, I don't like to tell you, Tops," said I, "but as you will have it, they are saying that you are getting mad." He jumped from his seat in alarm and anger.

"Me mad !" said he, looking as brisk and

fierce as if he was challenged then and there to mortal combat with an insignificant rat.

"Oh, well, don't mind them," said I soothingly. "People will talk. I don't believe a word of it, and that ought to be enough for you, I think."

"Well, it is enough," said Topsy, decisively. "And now as things have gone so far, though of course I don't mind what people say—I am above all that—but I'll tell you."

He resumed his seat near me, and commenced :

"You must know, sir," said he, "that I am not a common dog."

I bowed assent.

"I belong to the best and purest blood. I was born in a palace, and fed by a Princess. Now, in the refined society in which I moved, I was taught dignity, reserve, and easy manners, that should never admit excitement. I confess it did not quite suit my tastes. When I was glad, I'd like to show it, and when I was vexed. Sometimes, I confess, I'd give worlds to be able to wag my tail, but that would be very wrong. And I was often choking, for I was full of joy, and I dared not bark. However, it was respectable, and I was content. Since I came

into the bosom of your family, sir, all this is changed. There is no respectability here——”

“Topsy, sir,” said I, “what do you mean?”

“I beg your pardon, sir, I am sure,” said Topsy; “but I didn’t mean any offence. I meant that people here are free to show their feelings, and I was not slow in showing mine. I ran and barked at my own pleasure. I gave myself up to my impulses. I became familiar, and I suffer the consequences. Nobody respects me.”

“I am sure I have the greatest regard for you, Topsy,” said I, “and I know the boys and girls are really fond of you.”

“Ah, there it is,” said Topsy; “they may be fond of me, but they don’t respect me. Imagine,” said he, waxing very angry, “imagine the impropriety of that wretched cook who flung me a huge nasty bone the other day, big enough for a mastiff, me who was daily fed on chicken and biscuit and sherry. Then your wife, sir (I speak of course with all deference), never allows me to enter the drawing-room when she is present, and is quite alarmed when I romp with the children. Your boys, too, put mustard on bread, and even whiskey, pah! and compel me

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to eat it. They put pepper in my eyes and fling me into dirty pools : me, whose coat was daily washed with perfumed soap and eau-de-Cologne : nay, they have had the audacity of striking the piano with my paws and creating hideous noises, me, who have listened with delight to the *sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven.*"

"Topsy," said I gravely, "Topsy, isn't this a little too strong ?"

"Not at all, sir," said Topsy. "In my former place, I always attended the theatre, particularly when operas and high-class music were being performed, and sat with my paws on the velvet cushions of the boxes, listening with delight to the melody, and every glass in the house was levelled at me." He looked quite proud and pleased for the moment. "But I could stand it all," he resumed bitterly, "if I were not perpetually reminded of my dependent and degrading position by that person upstairs whom they call 'The Baby.' One would think there never was a baby in the world before. I'm sure I don't see anything remarkable about the Baby. Until she came, people used to pet and fondle me. Now everybody despises me. Yet she has no hair ; and look at me. Her eyes

are closed half the day and all the night ; and look at mine. She screams most dreadfully. In fact, my nerves are quite disturbed. And she has had the audacity to patronise me, and call me, 'Poo' doddy ! poo' doddy !' I really cannot stand it any longer." And Topsy put on an air of offended dignity that would have done credit to a judge.

"Topsy," said I quietly, "there is a great deal in what you say. I certainly must check my boys for treating you so cruelly. Boys are thoughtless. And really, I know, Charlie and Willy are very fond of you. I've heard them boast of your beauty and accomplishments to strangers, and in fact they think there's no dog in the world like you."

Topsy looked quite delighted, but he had not given in.

"Then you know," I continued, "cook does not understand your history, and does not appreciate the distinctions you have made. But as to Baby—I am afraid, Tops, Baby won't trouble any of us much longer."

"What, sir," said Tops, jumping in alarm from his seat, "is Baby going away ?"

"She is very sick," said I quietly. "Doctor

Smith was here this afternoon, and he and I think she can scarcely live. The poor little thing is convulsed, and is suffering very much pain. And we were all so fond of her. And I am sure she was fond of you, Topsy."

Topsy was looking intently at the fire. All his discontent and defiance had passed away. He looked at first alarmed, then ashamed, then as memory brought the past before him, he became very much grieved, until I saw a big ball slowly gathering in his eyes, and then rolling along his furred cheek. He put up his paw, and secretly wiped it away.

I had said enough. "Good-night, Topsy," I exclaimed, as I threw the end of my cigar into the fire, and slowly turned down the lamp.

"Bow-wow!" said Topsy very demurely, as he silently left the room.

Next morning, while at breakfast, nurse came in.

"How is Baby, nurse?"

"Very much better, sir," said nurse. "But that dog——"

"What about Topsy?" said I, remembering our conversation the previous evening.

"Why, sir," said she, "he came up late last

night, when all were in bed, and began scratching at the door of the nursery. I was at first alarmed, but I quietly opened the door, and let him in. He came over, and looked at me wistfully, and then at Baby, and then lay down and began whining in a low tone, and whenever Baby put her hand outside the clothes, he licks her hand until I stop him, and I am afraid to remove him, and the doctor is coming."

"Never mind, nurse," said I; "I understand; let him alone."

Baby got well, and no knight of old was ever so attentive to "faire ladye" as Topsy is to Baby. He sleeps at the foot of her cradle, runs before her when she is rolled in her perambulator, plays a thousand tricks to amuse her, and thinks "poo' doddy" the greatest compliment in the world.

Like many whom we meet, Topsy had had a fit of dignity, and he was miserable. He is again himself, and is happy.

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